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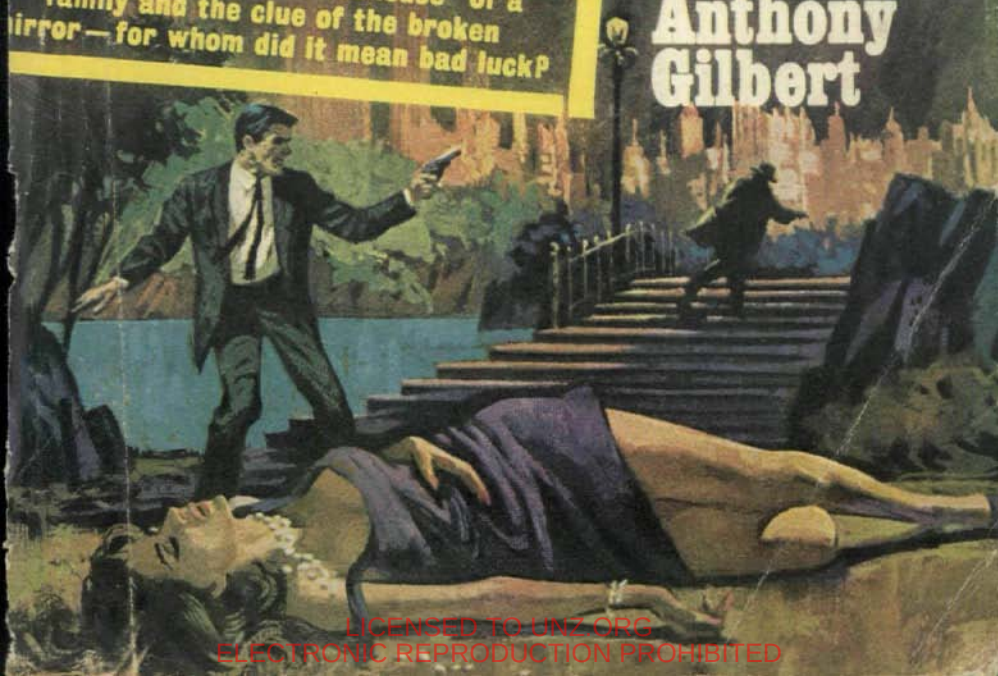

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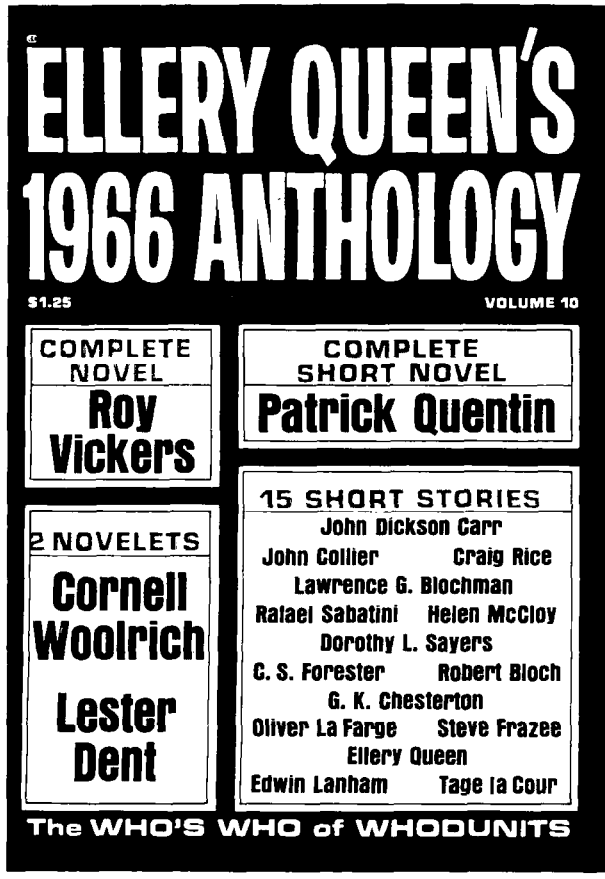

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Once again we ask you to snuggle comfortably into an easy chair, with a tall frosty glass at your side, or a box of chocolates, or something equally delectable, and let your mind and memory drift back a generation—back to the detective story of the Golden Thirties, complete with clues and suspects and interrogations and theories and—yes, even a diagram of the scene of the crime!—all the classical and traditional ingredients, all the panoply and paraphernalia and pyrotechnics of the grand old game . . . and find out, between sips and nibbles, the kind of man Sir Gervase Chevenix-Gore was, and learn about his "madhouse" of a family, and puzzle over the clue of the broken mirror—for whom did it mean bad luck, for whom good luck?

In a word—relax.

In a phrase—oodles of enjoyment.

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HERCULE POIROT AND THE BROKEN MIRROR

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

THE FLAT WAS A MODERN ONE. The furnishings of the room were modern, too. The armchairs were squarely built, the upright chairs angular. A modern writing-table was set squarely in front of the window, and at it sat a small, elderly man. His head was practically the only thing in the room that was not square. It was egg-shaped.

M. Hercule Poirot was reading a letter:

M. Hercule Poirot.

Dear Sir,—A matter has arisen which requires handling with great delicacy and discretion. I have heard good accounts of you, and have decided to entrust the matter to you. I have reason to believe that I am the victim of fraud, but for family reasons I do not wish to call in the police.

I am taking certain measures of my own to deal with the business,

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but you must be prepared to come down here immediately on receipt of a telegram. I should be obliged if you will not answer this letter.

Yours faithfully,

Gervase Chevenix-Gore

The eyebrows of M. Hercule Poirot climbed slowly up his forehead until they nearly disappeared into his hair.

"And who, then," he demanded of space, "is this Gervase Chevenix-Gore?"

He crossed to a bookcase, took out a large fat book, and found what he wanted.

Chevenix-Gore, Sir Gervase Francis Xavier, 10th Bt. cr. 1694; formerly Captain 17th Lancers; b, 18th May, 1878; e.s. of Sir Guy Chevenix-Gore, 9th Bt., and Lady Claudia Bretherton, 2nd d. of 8th Earl of Wallingford. S. father, 1911; m. 1912, Vanda Elizabeth, e.d. of Colonel Frederick Arbuthnot, q.v.; educ. Eton. Served European War, 1914-18. Recreations; traveling, big-game hunting. Address: Hamborough St. Mary, Westshire, and 218 Lowndes Square, S.W.I. Clubs: Cavalry. Travellers.

Poirot shook his head in a slightly dissatisfied manner. For a moment or two he remained lost in thought, then he went to the desk, pulled open a drawer, and took out a little pile of invitation cards.

His face brightened.

"*A la bonne heure!* Exactly my affair! He will certainly be there."

A duchess greeted M. Hercule Poirot in fulsome tones. "So you could manage to come after all, M. Poirot! Why, that's splendid."

"The pleasure is mine, Madame," murmured Poirot, bowing.

He escaped from several important and splendid beings—a famous diplomat, an equally famous actress, a well-known sporting peer—and found at last the person he had come to seek, that invariably "also present" guest, Mr. Satterthwaite.

Mr. Satterthwaite twittered amiably.

"The dear Duchess—I always enjoy her parties. Such a *personality*, if you know what I mean. I saw a lot of her in Corsica some years ago."

Mr. Satterthwaite's conversation was apt to be unduly burdened by mentions of his titled acquaintances. It is possible that he *may* sometimes have found pleasure in the company of Messrs. Jones, Brown, and Robinson, but, if so, he did not mention the fact. And yet, to describe Mr. Satterthwaite as a mere snob and leave it at that would have been to do him an injustice. He was a keen observer of human nature, and if it is true that the looker-on knows most of the game, Mr. Satterthwaite knew a good deal.

"You know, my dear fellow, it is really ages since I saw you. I always feel myself privileged to have seen you work at close quarters in the Crow's Nest business. I feel since

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then that I am in the know, so to speak. I saw Lady Mary only last week, by the way. A charming creature—pot-pourri and lavender!"

After passing lightly on one or two scandals of the moment—the indiscretions of an Earl's daughter, and the lamentable conduct of a Viscount—Poirot succeeded in introducing the name of Gervase Chevenix-Gore.

Mr. Satterthwaite responded immediately.

"Ah, now, there *is* a character, if you like! The Last of the Baronets—that's his nickname."

"*Pardon,* I do not quite comprehend."

Mr. Satterthwaite unbent indulgently to the lower comprehension of a foreigner.

"It's a joke, you know—a *joke.* Naturally, he's not *really* the last Baronet in England—but he *does* represent the end of an era. The Bold Bad Baronet—the mad harum-scarum Baronet so popular in the novels of the last century—the kind of fellow who laid impossible wagers and won 'em."

He went on to expound what he meant. In his younger years Gervase Chevenix-Gore had sailed round the world in a windjammer. He had been on an expedition to the South Pole. He had challenged a peer to a duel. For a wager he had ridden his favorite mare up the staircase of a ducal house. He had once leaped from a box to the stage, and carried off a well-known actress in the middle of her role.

The anecdotes of him were innumerable.

"It's an old family," went on Mr. Satterthwaite. "Sir Guy de Chevenix went on the first crusade. Now, alas, the line looks as if it is coming to an end. Old Gervase is the last Chevenix-Gore."

"The estate, it is impoverished?"

"Not a bit of it. Gervase is fabulously wealthy. Owns valuable property and in addition he staked out a claim to some mine in Peru or somewhere in South America, when he was a young man, which has yielded him a fortune. An amazing man. Always lucky in everything he's undertaken."

"He is now an elderly man, of course?"

"Yes, poor old Gervase." Mr. Satterthwaite sighed. "Most people would describe him to you as mad as a hatter. It's true, in a way. He *is* mad—not in the sense of being certifiable or having delusions—but mad in the sense of being abnormal. He's always been a man of great originality of character."

"And originality becomes eccentricity as the years go by?" suggested Poirot.

"Very true. That's exactly what's happened to poor old Gervase."

"He has, perhaps, a swollen idea of his own importance?"

"Absolutely. I should imagine that, in Gervase's mind, the world has always been divided into two

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parts—the Chevenix-Gores and the other people."

"An exaggerated sense of family?"

"Yes. The Chevenix-Gores are all arrogant as the devil—a law unto themselves. Gervase, being the last of them, has got it badly. He is—well, really, you know, to hear him talk, you might imagine him to be—er, the Almighty!"

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, I imagined that. I have had, you see, a letter from him. It was an unusual letter. It did not demand. It summoned!"

"A royal command," said Mr. Satterthwaite.

"Precisely. It did not seem to occur to this Sir Gervase that I, Hercule Poirot, am a man of importance, a man of infinite affairs! That it was extremely unlikely that I should be able to fling everything aside and come hastening like an obedient dog—like a mere nobody, gratified to receive a commission!"

Mr. Satterthwaite bit his lip in an effort to suppress a smile. It may have occurred to him that where egoism was concerned, there was not much to choose between Hercule Poirot and Gervase Chevenix-Gore.

He murmured, "Of course, if the cause of the summons were urgent—?"

"It was not!" Poirot's hands rose in the air in an emphatic gesture. "I was to hold myself at his disposition, that was all, *in case* he should require me!"

Again the hands rose eloquently, expressing better than words M. Hercule Poirot's sense of utter outrage.

"I take it," said Mr. Satterthwaite, "that you refused?"

"I have not yet had the opportunity," said Poirot slowly.

"But you will refuse?"

A new expression passed over the little man's face. His brow furrowed itself perplexedly.

He said, "How can I express myself? To refuse—yes, that was my first instinct. But I do not know . . . One has, sometimes, a feeling. Faintly, I seem to smell the fish."

Mr. Satterthwaite received this last statement without any sign of amusement.

"Oh?" he said. "That is interesting."

"It seems to me," went on Hercule Poirot, "that a man such as you have described might be very vulnerable—"

"Vulnerable?" queried Mr. Satterthwaite. For the moment he was surprised. The word was not one that he would naturally have associated with Gervase Chevenix-Gore. But he was a man of perception, quick in observation. "I think I see what you mean."

"Such a one is encased, is he not, in an armor—such an armor! The armor of the crusaders was nothing to it—an armor of arrogance, of pride, of complete self-esteem.

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This armor, it is in some ways a protection—the arrows, the everyday arrows of life glance off it. But there is this danger: Sometimes a man in armor might not even know he was being attacked. He will be slow to see, slow to hear—slower still to feel."

He paused, then asked with a change of manner, "Of what does the family of this Sir Gervase consist?"

"There's Vanda—his wife. She was an Arbuthnot—very handsome girl. She's still quite a handsome woman. Frightfully vague, though. Devoted to Gervase. She's got a leaning toward the occult, I believe. Wears amulets and scarabs and gives out that she's the reincarnation of an Egyptian Queen.

"Then there's Ruth—she's their adopted daughter. They've no children of their own. Very attractive girl in the modern style. That's all the family. Except, of course, for Hugo Trent. He's Gervase's nephew.

"Pamela Chevenix-Gore married Reggie Trent and Hugo was their only child. He's an orphan. He can't inherit the title, of course, but I imagine he'll come in for most of Gervase's money in the end. Good-looking lad, he's in the Blues."

Poirot nodded. "It is a grief to Sir Gervase that he has no son to inherit his name?"

"I should image it cuts pretty deep."

"The family name, it is a passion with him?"

"Yes."

Mr. Satterthwaite was silent a moment or two. Finally he ventured, "You see a definite reason for going down to Hamborough Close?"

Poirot shook his head.

"No," he said. "As far as I can see, there is no reason at all. But, all the same, I fancy I shall go."

Hercule Poirot sat in the corner of a first-class carriage speeding through the English countryside. Meditatively he took from his pocket a neatly folded telegram, which he opened and reread:

TAKE FOUR THIRTY FROM ST. PANCRAS INSTRUCT GUARD HAVE EXPRESS STOPPED AT WHIMPERLEY.

CHEVENIX-GORE

He folded up the telegram again and put it back in his pocket.

The guard on the train had been obsequious. The gentleman was going to Hamborough Close? Oh, yes, Sir Gervase Chevenix-Gore guests always had the express stopped at Whimperley. "A special kind of prerogative, I think it is, sir."

Since then the guard had paid two visits to the carriage—the first in order to assure the traveler that everything would be done to keep the carriage for himself, the second to announce that the express was running ten minutes late.

The train was due to arrive at

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7:50, but it was exactly two minutes past eight when Hercule Poirot descended onto the platform of the little country station and pressed the expected half crown into the attentive guard's hand.

There was a whistle from the engine, and the Northern Express began to move once more. A tall chauffeur in dark green uniform stepped up to Poirot.

"Mr. Poirot? For Hamborough Close?"

He picked up the detective's neat valise and led the way out of the station. A big Rolls was waiting. The chauffeur held the door open for Poirot to get in, arranged a fur rug over his knees, and they drove off.

After ten minutes of cross-country driving, round sharp corners and down country lanes, the car turned in at a wide gateway flanked with huge stone griffons.

They drove through a park and up to the house. The door of it was opened as they drew up, and a butler showed himself on the front step.

"Mr. Poirot? This way, sir."

He led the way down the hall and threw open a door halfway along it on the right.

"Mr. Hercule Poirot," he announced.

The room contained a number of people in evening dress, and as Poirot walked in, his quick eyes perceived at once that his appearance was not expected. The eyes of all present rested on him in unfeigned surprise.

Then a tall woman, whose dark hair was threaded with gray, made an uncertain advance toward him.

Poirot bowed over her hand.

"My apologies, Madame," he said. "I fear that my train was late."

"Not at all," said Lady Chevenix-Gore vaguely. Her eyes still stared at him in a puzzled fashion. "Not at all, Mr.—er—I didn't quite hear—"

"Hercule Poirot."

He said the name clearly and distinctly.

Somewhere behind him he heard a sudden sharp intake of breath. At the same time he realized that clearly his host could not be in the room.

He murmured gently, "You knew I was coming, madame?"

"Oh—oh, yes." Her manner was not convincing. "I think—I mean I suppose so, but I am so terribly impractical, M. Poirot. I forget everything." Her tone held a melancholy pleasure in the fact. "I am told things. I appear to take them in—but they just pass through my brain and are gone! Vanished! As though they had never been."

Then, with a slight air of performing a duty long overdue, she glanced round her vaguely and murmured, "I expect you know everybody."

Though this was patently not the case, the phrase was clearly a

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well-worn formula by means of which Lady Chevenix-Gore spared herself the trouble of introduction and the strain of remembering people's right names.

Making a supreme effort to meet the difficulties of this particular case, she added, "My daughter—Ruth."

The girl who stood before him was also tall and dark, but she was of a very different type. Instead of the flattish, indeterminate features of Lady Chevenix-Gore, she had a well-chiseled nose, slightly aquiline, and a clear sharp line of jaw. Her black hair swept back from her face into a mass of little tight curls. Her coloring was of carnation clearness and brilliance, and owed little to make-up. She was, Hercule Poirot thought, one of the loveliest girls he had ever seen.

He recognized, too, that she had brains as well as beauty, and guessed at certain qualities of pride and temper. Her voice, when she spoke, came with a slight drawl that struck him as deliberately put on.

"How exciting," she said, "to entertain M. Hercule Poirot! The Old Man arranged a little surprise for us, I suppose."

"So you did not know I was coming, mademoiselle?" he said quickly.

"I had no idea of it. As it is, I must postpone getting my autograph book until after dinner."

The notes of a gong sounded from the hall, then the butler opened the door and announced, "Dinner is served."

And then, almost before the last word, "served," had been uttered, something very curious happened. The pontifical domestic figure became, just for one moment, a highly astonished human being.

The metamorphosis was so quick, and the mask of the well-trained servant was back again so soon, that anyone who had not happened to be looking would have failed to see the change. Poirot, however, *had* happened to be looking. He wondered.

The butler hesitated in the doorway. Though his face was again correctly expressionless, an air of tension hung about his figure.

Lady Chevenix-Gore said uncertainly, "Oh, dear—this is most extraordinary. Really, I—one hardly knows what to do."

Ruth said to Poirot, "This singular consternation, M. Poirot, is occasioned by the fact that my father, for the first time for at least twenty years, is late for dinner."

"It is most extraordinary—" wailed Lady Chevenix-Gore. "Gervase never—"

An elderly man of upright soldierly carriage came to her side. He laughed genially.

"Good old Gervase! Late at last! Upon my word, we'll rag him over this. Elusive collar stud, d'you think? Or is Gervase immune from our common weaknesses?"

Lady Chevenix-Gore said in a

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low, puzzled voice, "But Gervase is *never* late."

It was almost ludicrous, the consternation caused by this simple *contretemps*. And yet, to Hercule Poirot, it was *not* ludicrous.

Behind the consternation he felt uneasiness—perhaps even apprehension. And he, too, found it strange that Gervase Chevenix-Gore should not appear to greet the guest he had summoned in such a mysterious manner.

In the meantime, it was clear that nobody knew quite what to do. An unprecedented situation had arisen.

Lady Chevenix-Gore at last took the initiative, if initiative it could be called.

"Snell," she said, "is your master—?"

She did not finish the sentence, merely looked at the butler expectantly.

Snell, who was clearly used to his mistress's methods of seeking information, replied promptly to the unspecified question.

"Sir Gervase came downstairs at five minutes to eight, m'lady, and went straight to the study."

"Oh, I see—" Her mouth remained open, her eyes seemed far away. "You don't think—I mean—he heard the gong?"

"I think he must have done so, m'lady, the gong being immediately outside the study door. I did not, of course, know that Sir Gervase was still in the study, otherwise I should have announced to him that dinner as ready. Shall I do so now, m'lady?"

Lady Chevenix-Gore seized on the suggestion with manifest relief.

"Oh, thank you, Snell. Yes, please do."

She said, as the butler left the room, "Snell is such a treasure. I rely on him absolutely. I really don't know what I should *do* without Snell."

Somebody murmured a sympathetic assent, but nobody spoke. Hercule Poirot, watching that room full of people with suddenly sharpened attention, had an idea that all were in a state of tension.

His eyes ran quickly over them, tabulating them roughly. Two elderly men—the soldierly one who had spoken just now, and a thin, spare, gray-haired man with closely pinched legal lips.

Two youngish men—very different in type from each other. One with a mustache and an air of modest arrogance, he guessed to be Sir Gervase's nephew, the one in the Blues. The other, with sleek brushed-back hair and a rather obvious style of good looks, he put down as of a definitely inferior social class.

There were also a small middle-aged woman with pince-nez and intelligent eyes and a girl with flaming red hair.

Snell appeared at the door. His manner was perfect, but once again the veneer of the impersonal butler

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showed signs of the perturbed human being.

"Excuse me, m'lady, the study door is locked."

"Locked?"

It was a man's voice—young, alert, with a ring of excitement in it. It was the good-looking young man with the slicked-back hair who had spoken. "Shall I go and see—?"

But very quietly Hercule Poirot took command. He did it so naturally that no one thought it odd that this stranger, who had just arrived, should suddenly assume charge of the situation.

"Come," he said. "Let us go to the study." He continued, speaking to Snell, "Lead the way, if you please."

Snell obeyed. Poirot followed close behind him, and, like a flock of sheep, the others followed Poirot.

Snell led the way through the big hall, past the great branching curve of the staircase, past an enormous Grandfather clock and a recess in which stood a gong, then along a narrow passage which ended in a door.

Here Poirot passed Snell and gently tried the handle. It turned, but the door did not open. Poirot rapped gently with his knuckles on the panel of the door. He rapped louder. Then, suddenly desisting, he dropped to his knees and applied his eye to the keyhole.

Slowly he rose and looked around. His face was stern.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this door *must* be broken open immediately!"

Under his direction the two young men, who were both tall and powerfully built, attacked the door. It was no easy matter. The doors of Hamborough Close were solidly built.

At last, however, the lock gave, and the door swung inward with a noise of splintering wood.

And then, for a moment, everyone stood still, huddled in the doorway looking at the scene inside. The lights were on. Along the left-hand wall was a big writing-table, a massive affair of solid mahogany. Sitting, not at the table, but sideways to it, so that his back was directly toward them, was a big man slouched down in a chair. His head and the upper part of his body hung down over the right side of the chair, and his right hand and arm hung limply down.

Just below it on the carpet was a small, gleaming pistol.

There was no need of speculation. The picture was clear. Sir Gervase Chevenix-Gore had shot himself.

For a moment or two the group in the doorway stood motionless, staring at the scene. Then Poirot strode forward.

At the same moment Hugo Trent said crisply, "My God, the Old Man's shot himself!"

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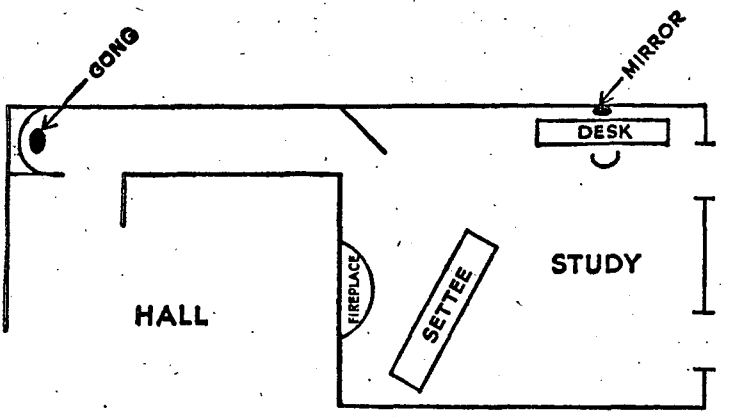

And there was a long, shuddering moan from Lady Chevenix-Gore.

"Oh, Gervase—Gervase!"

Over his shoulder Poirot said sharply, "Take Lady Chevenix-Gore away."

The soldierly man said, "Come, Vanda, my dear. You can do nothing. Ruth, come and look after your mother."

But Ruth Chevenix-Gore had pressed into the room and stood close by Poirot's side as he bent over the sprawled figure in the chair—the figure of a man of Herculean build with a Viking beard.

She said in a low, tense voice, curiously restrained and muffled, "You're quite sure he's—dead?"

Poirot looked up.

The girl's face was alive with some emotion—an emotion sternly checked and repressed—that he did not quite understand. It was not grief—it seemed more like a kind of half-fearful excitement.

The little woman in the pince-nez murmured, "Your mother, my dear—don't you think—?"

In a high, hysterical voice the girl with the red hair cried out, "Then it *wasn't* a backfire or a champagne cork! It was a *shot* we heard . . ."

Poirot turned and faced them. "Somebody must communicate with the police."

Ruth Chevenix-Gore cried out violently, "No!"

The elderly man with the legal face said, "Unavoidable, I am afraid. Will you see to that, Burrows? Hugo—"

Poirot said, "You are Mr. Hugo Trent?" to the tall young man with the mustache. "It would be well, I think, if everyone except you and I were to leave this room."

Again his authority was not questioned. The lawyer shepherded the others away. Poirot and Hugo Trent were left alone.

The latter said, staring, "Look

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here—who *are* you? I mean, I haven't the foggiest idea. What are you doing here?"

Poirot took a card case from his pocket and selected a card.

Hugo Trent said, "Private detective—eh? But I still don't see what you are doing *here*."

"You did not know that your uncle—he was your uncle, was he not—?"

Hugo's eyes dropped for a fleeting moment to the dead man. "The Old Man? Yes, he was my uncle."

"You did not know that he had sent for me?"

Hugo shook his head. "I'd no idea of it."

There was an emotion in his voice that was rather hard to classify. His face looked wooden and stupid—the kind of expression, Poirot thought, that made a useful mask in times of stress.

Poirot said quietly, "We are in Westshire, are we not? I know your Chief Constable, Major Riddle, very well."

Hugo said, "Riddle lives about half a mile away. He'll probably come over himself."

"That," said Poirot, "will be very convenient."

He began prowling round the room. He twitched aside the window curtains and examined the French windows, trying them gently. They were closed.

On the wall behind the desk hung a round mirror. The mirror was splintered. Poirot bent and picked up a small object.

"What's that?" asked Hugo Trent.

"The bullet."

"It passed straight through his head and struck the mirror?"

"It seems so."

Poirot replaced the bullet meticulously where he had found it. He came up to the desk. Some papers were arranged neatly. On the blotting pad itself there was a loose sheet of paper with the word *SORRY* printed across it in large, shaky handwriting.

Hugo said, "He must have written that just before he—did it."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

He looked again at the smashed mirror, then at the dead man. His brow creased itself a little as though in perplexity. He went over to the door, where it hung crookedly with its splintered lock.

There was no key in the door, as he know—otherwise he would not have been able to see through the keyhole. There was no sign of it on the floor. Poirot leaned over the dead man and ran his fingers over him.

"Yes," he said. "The key is in his pocket."

Hugo drew out a cigarette case and lighted a cigarette. He spoke rather hoarsely.

"It seems all quite clear," he said. "My uncle shut himself up in here, scrawled that message on a

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piece of paper, and then shot himself."

Poirot nodded meditatively as Hugo went on, "But I don't understand why he sent for you."

"That is rather more difficult to explain. While we are waiting, Mr. Trent, for the authorities to take charge, perhaps you will tell me exactly who all the people are whom I saw tonight."

"Who they are?" Hugo spoke almost absently. "Oh, yes, of course. Sorry. Shall we sit down?" He indicated a settee in the farthest corner of the room from the body. He went on, speaking jerkily, "Well, there's Vanda—my aunt, you know. And Ruth, my cousin. Then the other girl is Susan Cardwell. She's just staying here. And there's Colonel Bury. He's an old friend of the family. And Mr. Oswald Forbes. He's an old friend, too, besides being the family lawyer.

"Both the old boys had a passion for Vanda when she was young, and they still hang round in a faithful, devoted sort of way. Ridiculous, but rather touching. Then there's Godfrey Burrows, the Old Man's—I mean my uncle's—secretary, and Miss Lingard, who's here to help him write a history of the Chevenix-Gores. She does research work for writers. That's the lot, I think."

Poirot nodded. "And I understand you actually heard the shot that killed your uncle?"

"Yes, we did. Thought it was a champagne cork—at least, I did. Susan and Miss Lingard thought it was a car backfiring outside—the road runs quite near, you know."

"When was this?"

"Oh, about ten past eight. Snell had just sounded the first gong."

"And where were you when you heard it?"

"In the hall. We were laughing about it—arguing, you know, as to where the sound came from. I said it came from the dining room, and Susan said it came from the direction of the drawing room, and Miss Lingard said it sounded like upstairs, and Snell said it came from the road outside, only it came through the upstairs windows. And Susan said, 'Any more theories?' And I laughed and said there was always murder! Seems pretty rotten to think of now."

His face twitched nervously.

"It did not occur to anyone that Sir Gervase might have shot himself?"

"No, of course not."

"You have, in fact, no idea why he should have shot himself?"

Hugo said slowly, "Oh, well, I shouldn't say that—"

"You *have* an idea?"

"Yes—well—it's difficult to explain. Naturally I didn't expect him to commit suicide, but all the same I'm not frightfully surprised. The truth is, my uncle was as mad as a hatter, M. Poirot. Everyone knew that."

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"That strikes you as a sufficient explanation?"

"Well, people do shoot themselves when they're a bit balmy."

"An explanation of an admirable simplicity."

Hugo stared.

Poirot wandered aimlessly round the room. It was comfortably furnished, mainly in a heavy Victorian style. There were massive bookcases, huge armchairs, and upright chairs of genuine Chippendale. There were not many ornaments, but some bronzes on the mantelpiece attracted Poirot's attention and apparently stirred his admiration.

He picked them up one by one, carefully examining them before replacing them with care. From the one on the extreme left he detached something with a fingernail.

"What's that?" asked Hugo.

"Nothing very much. A tiny sliver of the looking glass."

Hugo said, "Funny the way that mirror was smashed by the shot. A broken mirror means bad luck. Poor old Gervase . . . I suppose his luck had held a bit too long."

"Your uncle was a lucky man?"

Hugo gave a short laugh.

"Why, his luck was proverbial! Everything he touched turned to gold! If he backed an outsider, it romped home. If he invested in a doubtful mine, they struck a vein of ore. He's had the most amazing escapes from tight places. His life's been saved by a kind of miracle more than once. He was rather a fine old boy, in his way, you know. He'd certainly 'been places and seen things'—more than most of his generation."

Poirot murmured in a conversational tone, "You were attached to your uncle, Mr. Trent?"

Hugo Trent seemed a little startled by the question.

"Oh—er—yes, of course," he said rather vaguely. "You know, he was a bit difficult at times. Frightful strain to live with, and all that. Fortunately I didn't have to see much of him."

"*He* was fond of *you*?"

"Not so that you'd notice it! As a matter of fact, he rather resented my existence, so to speak."

"How was that, Mr. Trent?"

"Well, you see, he had no son of his own. He was mad about family and all that sort of thing. I believe it cut him to the quick to know that when he died the Chevenix-Gores would cease to exist. They've been going ever since the Norman Conquest, you know. The Old Man was the last of them. I suppose it *was* rather rotten from his point of view."

"You yourself do not share that sentiment?"

Hugo shrugged. "All that sort of thing seems to me rather out of date."

"What will happen to the estate?"

"Don't really know. I might get it. Or he may have left it to Ruth.

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Probably Vanda has it for her lifetime."

"Your uncle did not definitely declare his intentions?"

"Well, he had his pet idea."

"And what was that?"

"His idea was that Ruth and I should make a match of it."

"That would doubtless have been very suitable."

"Eminently suitable. But Ruth—well, Ruth has very decided views of her own about life. Mind you, she's an extremely attractive young woman, and she knows it. She's in no hurry to marry and settle down."

Poirot leaned forward. "But you yourself would have been willing, M. Trent?"

Hugo said in a bored tone of voice, "I really can't see it makes a ha'p'orth of difference who you marry nowadays. Divorce is so easy. If you're not hitting it off, nothing is easier than to cut the tangle and start again."

The door opened and Forbes, the family lawyer, entered with a tall, spruce-looking man.

The latter nodded to Trent.

"Hallo, Hugo. I'm extremely sorry about this. Very rough on all of you."

Hercule Poirot came forward. "How do you do, Major Riddle? You remember me?"

"Yes, indeed," The Chief Constable shook hands. "So *you're* down here?"

There was a meditative note in his voice. He glanced curiously at Hercule Poirot.

"Well?" said Major Riddle.

It was twenty minutes later. The Chief Constable's interrogative "Well?" was addressed to the police surgeon, a lank man with grizzled hair.

The latter shrugged. "He's been dead over half an hour—but not more than an hour. You don't want technicalities, I know, so I'll spare you them. The man was shot through the head, the pistol being held only a few inches from the right temple. Bullet passed right through the brain and out again."

"Compatible with suicide?"

"Oh, perfectly. The body then slumped down in the chair, and the pistol dropped from his hand."

"You've got the bullet?"

"Yes." The doctor held it up.

"Good," said Major Riddle. "We'll keep it for comparison with the pistol. Glad it's a clear case with no difficulties."

Hercule Poirot asked gently, "You are sure there *are* no difficulties, Doctor?"

The doctor replied slowly, "Well, I suppose you might call one thing a little odd. When he shot himself he must have been leaning slightly over to the right. Otherwise the bullet would have hit the wall *below* the mirror, instead of in the middle."

"An uncomfortable position in

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which to commit suicide," said Poirot.

The doctor shrugged again. "Oh, well—comfort—if you're going to end it all—" He left the sentence unfinished.

Major Riddle said, "The body can be moved now?"

"Oh, yes. I've done with it until the P.M."

"What about you, Inspector?" Major Riddle spoke to a tall impassive-faced man in plain clothes.

"Okay, sir. We've got all we want. Only the deceased's fingerprints are on the pistol."

The mortal remains of Gervase Chevenix-Gore were removed. The Chief Constable and Poirot were left together.

"Well," said Riddle, "everything seems quite clear and aboveboard. Door locked on the inside, windows fastened, key of door in dead man's pocket. Everything according to Hoyle—but for one circumstance."

"And what is that, my friend?" inquired Poirot.

"You!" said Riddle bluntly. "What are *you* doing down here?"

By way of reply, Poirot handed to him the letter he had received from the dead man a week ago, and the telegram which had finally brought him there.

"Humph," said the Chief Constable. "Interesting. We'll have to get to the bottom of this. I should say it had a direct bearing on his suicide."

"I agree."

"We must check up on who is in the house."

"I can tell you their names. I have just been making inquiries of Mr. Trent."

He repeated the list of names.

"Perhaps you, Major Riddle, know something about these people?"

"I know something of them, naturally. Lady Chevenix-Gore is quite as mad in her own way as old Sir Gervase. They were devoted to each other—and both quite mad. She's the vaguest creature that ever lived, with an occasional uncanny shrewdness that strikes the nail on the head in the most surprising fashion. People laugh at her a good deal. I think she knows it, but she doesn't care. She has absolutely no sense of humor."

"Miss Chevenix-Gore is only their adopted daughter, I understand?"

"Yes."

"A very handsome young lady."

"She's a devilishly attractive girl. Has played havoc with most of the young fellows round here. Leads them all on and then turns round and laughs at them. Good seat on a horse, and wonderful hands."

"That, for the moment, does not concern us."

"Er—no, perhaps not. Well, about the other people. I know old Bury, of course. He's here most of the time. Almost a tame cat about

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the house. Kind of A.D.C. to Lady Chevenix-Gore. He's a very old friend. They've known him all their lives. I think he and Sir Gervase were both interested in some company of which Bury is a director."

"Forbes, do you know anything of him?"

"I believe I've met him once."

"Miss Lingard?"

"Never heard of her."

"Miss Susan Cardwell?"

"The good-looking girl with red hair? I've seen her about with Ruth Chevenix-Gore the last few days."

"Burrows?"

"Yes, I know him. Chevenix-Gore's secretary. Between you and me, I don't take to him much. He's good-looking, and knows it. Not quite out of the top drawer."

"Had he been with Sir Gervase long?"

"About two years, I fancy."

"And there is no one else—?"

Poirot broke off as a tall, fair-haired man came hurrying in. He was out of breath and looked disturbed.

"Good evening, Major Riddle. I heard a rumor that Sir Gervase had shot himself, and I hurried up here. Snell tells me it's true. It's incredible! I can't believe it!"

"It's true enough, Lake. Let me introduce you. This is Captain Lake, Sir Gervase's agent for the estate. M. Hercule Poirot, of whom you may have heard."

Lake's face lit up with what seemed a kind of delighted incredulity. "M. Hercule Poirot? I'm pleased to meet you. At least—" He broke off, the quick charming smile vanished; he now looked disturbed and upset. "There isn't anything—fishy—about this suicide, is there, sir?"

"Why should there be anything 'fishy,' as you call it?" asked the Chief Constable sharply.

"I mean, because M. Poirot is here. Oh, and because the whole business seems so incredible!"

"No, no," said Poirot quickly. "I am not here on account of the death of Sir Gervase. I was already in the house—as a guest."

"Oh, I see. Funny, he never told me you were coming when I was going over accounts with him this afternoon."

Poirot said quietly, "You have twice used the word 'incredible,' Captain Lake. Are you, then, so surprised to hear of Sir Gervase committing suicide?"

"Indeed I am. Of course, he was mad as a hatter—everyone would agree about that. But all the same, I simply can't imagine his thinking the world would be able to get along without him."

"Yes," said Poirot. "It is a point, that." And he looked with appreciation at the frank, intelligent countenance of the young man.

Major Riddle cleared his throat. "Since you are here, Captain Lake, perhaps you will answer a few questions."

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"Certainly, sir."

Lake took a chair opposite the other two.

"When did you last see Sir Gervase?"

"This afternoon, just before three o'clock. There were some accounts to be checked, and the question of a new tenant for one of the farms."

"How long were you with him?"

"Perhaps half an hour."

"Think carefully, and tell me whether you noticed anything unusual in his manner."

The young man considered. "No, I hardly think so. He was, perhaps, a trifle excited—but that wasn't unusual with him."

"He was not depressed in any way?"

"Oh, no, he seemed in good spirits. He was enjoying himself very much just now, writing up a history of the family."

"How long had he been doing this?"

"He began it about six months ago."

"Is that when Miss Lingard came here?"

"No. She arrived about two months ago when he had discovered that he could not manage the necessary research work by himself."

"And you consider he was enjoying himself?"

"Oh, enormously! He really didn't think that anything else mattered in the world except his family."

There was a momentary bitterness in the young man's tone.

"Then, as far as you know, Sir Gervase had no worries of any kind?"

There was a slight—a very slight—pause before Captain Lake answered.

"No."

Poirot suddenly interposed a question. "Sir Gervase was not, you think, worried about his daughter in any way?"

"His daughter?"

"That is what I said."

"Not as far as I know," said the young man stiffly.

Poirot said nothing further.

Major Riddle said, "Well, thank you, Lake. Perhaps you'd better stay around."

"Certainly, sir." He rose. "Anything I can do?"

"Yes, you might send the butler here. And perhaps you'd find out for me how Lady Chevenix-Gore is, and if I could have a few words with her presently, or if she's too upset."

The young man nodded and left the room with a quick, decisive step.

"An attractive personality," said Hercule Poirot.

"Yes, nice fellow, and good at his job. Everyone likes him."

"Sit down, Snell," said Major Riddle in a friendly tone. "I've a

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good many questions to ask you, and I expect this has been a shock to you."

"Oh, it has indeed, sir. Thank you, sir." Snell sat down with such a discreet air that it was practically the same as though he had remained on his feet.

"Been here a good long time, haven't you?"

"Sixteen years, sir, ever since Sir Gervase—er—settled down, so to speak."

"Ah, yes, of course, your master was a great traveler in his day."

"Yes, sir. He went on an expedition to the South Pole and many other interesting places."

"Now, Snell, can you tell me when you last saw your master this evening?"

"I was in the dining room, sir, seeing that the table arrangements were all complete. The door into the hall was open, and I saw Sir Gervase come down the stairs, cross the hall, and go along the passage to the study."

"That was at what time?"

"Just before eight o'clock. It might have been as much as five minutes before eight."

"And that was the last you saw of him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear a shot?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir; but of course I had no idea at the time—how could I have had?"

"What did you think it was?"

"I thought it was a car, sir. The road runs quite near the park wall. Or it might have been a shot in the woods—a poacher, perhaps. I never dreamed—"

Major Riddle cut him short. "What time was that?"

"It was exactly eight minutes past eight, sir."

The Chief Constable said sharply, "How is it you can fix the time to a minute?"

"That's easy, sir. I had just sounded the first gong."

"The first gong?"

"Yes, sir. By Sir Gervase's orders, a gong was always to be sounded seven minutes before the actual dinner gong. Very particular he was, sir, that everyone should be assembled in the drawing room when the second gong went. As soon as I had sounded the second gong, I went to the drawing room and announced dinner."

"I begin to understand," said Hercule Poirot, "Why you looked so surprised when you announced dinner this evening. It was usual for Sir Gervase to be in the drawing room?"

"I'd never known him not be there before, sir. It was quite a shock. I little thought—"

Again Major Riddle interrupted. "And were the others also usually there?" Snell coughed. "Anyone late for dinner, sir, was never asked to the house again."

"H'm, very drastic."

"Sir Gervase, sir, employed a chef

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who was formerly with the Emperor of Moravia. He used to say, sir, that dinner was as important as a religious ritual."

"And what about his own family?"

"Lady Chevenix-Gore was always very particular not to upset him, sir, and even Miss Ruth dared not be late for dinner."

"Interesting," murmured Hercule Poirot.

"I see," said Riddle. "So, dinner being at a quarter past eight, you sounded the first gong at eight minutes past as usual?"

"That is so, sir—but it wasn't as usual. Dinner was usually at eight. Sir Gervase gave orders that dinner was to be a quarter of an hour later this evening, as he was expecting a gentleman by the late train."

Snell made a little bow toward Poirot as he spoke.

"When your master went to the study, did he look worried in any way?"

"I could not say, sir. It was too far for me to judge of his expression."

"Was he alone when he went to the study?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did anyone go to the study after that?"

"I could not say, sir. I went to the butler's pantry after that, and was there until I sounded the first gong at eight minutes past eight."

"That was when you heard the shot?"

"Yes, sir."

Poirot gently interposed a question. "There were others, I think, who also heard the shot?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Hugo and Miss Cardwell. And Miss Lingard."

"These people were also in the hall?"

"Miss Lingard came out from the drawing room, and Miss Cardwell and Mr. Hugo were just coming down the stairs."

Poirot asked, "was there any conversation about the matter?"

"Well, sir, Mr. Hugo asked if there was champagne for dinner. I told him that sherry, hock, and burgundy were being served."

"He thought it was a champagne cork?"

"Yes, sir."

"But nobody took it seriously?"

"Oh, no, sir. They all went into the drawing room talking and laughing."

"Where were the other members of the household?"

"I could not say, sir." Major Riddle said, "Do you know anything about this pistol?" He held it out as he spoke.

"Oh, yes, sir. That belonged to Sir Gervase. He always kept it in the drawer of his desk in here."

"Was it usually loaded?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

Major Riddle laid down the pistol and cleared his throat. "Now, Snell, I'm going to ask you a rather important question. I hope you will answer it as truthfully as you can. Do you know of any reason which

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might lead your master to commit suicide?"

"No, sir. I know of nothing."

"Sir Gervase had not been odd in his manner of late?"

Snell coughed apologetically. "You'll excuse my saying it, sir, but Sir Gervase was always what might have seemed to strangers a little odd in his manner. He was a highly original gentleman, sir."

"Yes, yes, I am quite aware of that."

"Outsiders, sir, did not always understand Sir Gervase."

Snell gave the word the definite value of a capital letter.

"I know. But there was nothing that *you* would have called unusual?"

The butler hesitated. "I think, sir, that Sir Gervase was worried about something," he said at last.

"Worried and depressed?"

"I shouldn't say depressed, sir. But worried, yes."

"Have you any idea of the cause of that worry?"

"No, sir."

"Was it connected with any particular person?"

"I could not say, sir. In any case, it is only an impression of mine."

Poirot spoke again. "You were surprised at his suicide?"

"Very surprised, sir. It has been a terrible shock to me. I never dreamed of such a thing."

Riddle glanced at him, then said, "Well, Snell, I think that is all we want to ask you."

"Thank you, sir."

Moving toward the doorway, Snell drew back and stood aside. Lady Chevenix-Gore floated into the room.

She was wearing an Oriental-looking garment of purple and orange silk wound tightly round her body. Her face was serene.

"Lady Chevenix-Gore." Major Riddle sprang to his feet.

She said, "They told me you would like to talk to me, so I came."

"Shall we go into another room? This must be painful for you in the extreme."

Lady Chevenix-Gore shook her head and sat down on one of the Chippendale chairs. She murmured, "Oh, no, what does it matter?"

"It is very good of you, Lady Chevenix-Gore, to put your feelings aside. I know what a frightful shock this must have been and—"

She interrupted him. "It was rather a shock at first," she admitted. Her tone was easy and conversational. "But there is no such thing as Death, really, you know, only Change."

She added, "As a matter of fact, Gervase is standing just behind your left shoulder now. I can see him distinctly."

Major Riddle's left shoulder twitched. He looked at Lady Chevenix-Gore rather doubtfully.

She smiled at him, a vague, happy smile.

"You don't believe, of course! So

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few people do. To me, the spirit world is quite as real as this one. But please ask me anything you like, and don't worry about distressing me. I'm not in the least distressed. Everything, you see, is Fate. One cannot escape one's Karma. It all fits in—the mirror—everything."

"The mirror, madame?" asked Poirot.

She nodded her head toward it vaguely.

"Yes. It's splintered, you see. A symbol! You know Tennyson's poem? I used to read it as girl—though, of course, I didn't realize then the esoteric side of it. 'The mirror cracked from side to side. "The curse is come upon me!" cried the Lady of Shalott.' That's what happened to Gervase. The Curse came upon him suddenly. I think, you know, most very old families have a curse . . . The mirror cracked. He knew that he was doomed! The Curse had come!"

"But, madame, it was not a curse that cracked the mirror—it was a bullet!"

Lady Chevenix-Gore said, still in the same sweet vague manner, "It's all the same thing, really. It was Fate."

"But your husband shot himself."

Lady Chevenix-Gore smiled indulgently.

"He shouldn't have done that, of course. But Gervase was always impatient. He could never wait. His hour had come—he went forward to meet it. It's all so simple, really."

Major Riddle, clearing his throat in exasperation, said sharply, "Then you weren't surprised at your husband's taking his own life? Had you been expecting such a thing to happen?"

"Oh, no." Her eyes opened wide. "One can't always foresee the future. Gervase, of course, was a very strange man, a very unusual man. He was quite unlike anyone else. He was one of the Great Ones born again. I've known that for some time. I think he knew it himself. He found it very hard to conform to the silly little standards of the everyday world."

She added, looking over Major Riddle's shoulder, "He's smiling now. He's thinking how foolish we all are. So we are really. Just like children. Pretending that life is real and that it matters. Life is only one of the Great Illusions."

Feeling that he was fighting a losing battle, Major Riddle asked desperately, "You can't help us at all as to *why* your husband should have taken his life?"

She shrugged her thin shoulders. "Forces move us—you cannot understand. You move only on the material plane."

Poirot coughed. "Talking of the material plane, have you any idea, Madame, as to how your husband has left his money?"

"Money?" she stared at him. "I never think of money." Her tone was disdainful.

Poirot switched to another point.

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"At what time did you come downstairs to dinner tonight?"

"Time? What is Time? Infinite, that is the answer. Time is infinite."

Poirot murmured, "But your husband. Madame, was rather particular about time—especially, so I have been told, as to the dinner hour."

"Dear Gervase," she smiled indulgently. "He was very foolish about that. But it made him happy. So we were never late."

"Were you in the drawing room, Madame, when the first gong went?"

"No, I was in my room then."

"Do you remember who was in the drawing room when you did come down?"

"Nearly everybody, I think," said Lady Chevenix-Gore vaguely. "Does it matter?"

"Possibly not," admitted Poirot. "Then there is something else. Did your husband ever tell you that he suspected he was being robbed?"

Lady Chevenix-Gore did not seem much interested in the question. "Robbed? No, I don't think so."

"Robbed, swindled—victimized in some way?"

"No—no—I don't think so. Gervase would have been very angry if anybody had dared to do anything like that."

"At any rate, he said nothing about it to you?"

"No—no." Lady Chevenix-Gore shook her head, still without much interest. "I should have remembered."

"When did you last see your husband alive?"

"He looked in, as usual, on his way downstairs before dinner. My maid was there. He just said he was going down."

"What has he talked about most in the last few weeks?"

"Oh, the family history. He was getting on so well with it. He found that funny old thing, Miss Lingard, quite invaluable. She looked up things for him in the British Museum—all that sort of thing. She worked with Lord Mulcaster on his book, you know. And she was tactful—I mean, she didn't look up the wrong things. After all, there are ancestors one doesn't want raked up. Gervase was very sensitive. She helped me, too. She got a lot of information for me about Hatshepsut. I am a reincarnation of Hatshepsut, you know."

Lady Chevenix-Gore made this announcement in a calm voice. "Before that," she went on, "I was a Priestess in Atlantis."

Major Riddle shifted a little in his chair.

"Er—er—very interesting," he said. "Well, really, Lady Chevenix-Gore, I think that will be all. Very kind of you."

Lady Chevenix-Gore rose, clasping her Oriental robes about her.

"Good night," she said. And then, her eyes shifting to a point behind Major Riddle, "Good night,

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Gervase dear. I wish you could come, but I know you have to stay here." She added in an explanatory fashion, "You have to stay in the place where you've passed over for at least twenty-four hours. It's some time before you can move about freely and communicate."

She trailed out of the room.

Major Riddle wiped his brow.

"Phew," he murmured. "She's a great deal madder than I thought. Does she really believe all that nonsense?"

"It is possible that she finds it helpful," Poirot said. "She needs, at this moment, to create for herself a world of illusion so that she can escape the stark reality of her husband's death."

"She seems almost certifiable to me," said Major Riddle. "A long farrago of nonsense without one word of sense in it."

"No, no, my friend. The interesting thing is, as Mr. Hugo Trent casually remarked to me, that amid all the vaporing there is an occasional shrewd thrust. She showed it by her remark about Miss Lingard's tact in not stressing undesirable ancestors. Believe me, Lady Chevenix-Gore is no fool."

He paced up and down.

"There are things in this affair that I do not like. No, I do not like them at all."

Riddle looked at him curiously.

"You mean the motive for his suicide?"

"Suicide—suicide! It is all wrong, I tell you. It is wrong psychologically. How did Chevenix-Gore think of himself? As a Colossus, as an immensely important person, as the center of the universe! Does such a man destory himself? Surely not. He is far more likely to destroy someone else—some miserable, crawling ant of a human being who has dared to cause him annoyance. Such an act he might regard as necessary. But self-destruction? The destruction of such a Self?"

"It's all very well, Poirot. But the evidence is clear enough. Door locked, key in his own pocket, windows closed and fastened. Anything else needed?"

"Yes, there is something else." Poirot sat down in the chair. "Here I am. I am Chevenix-Gore. I am sitting at my desk. I am determined to kill myself because—because, let us say, I have made a discovery concerning some terrific dishonor to the family name. It is not very convincing, that, but it must suffice.

"Eh bien, what do I do? I scrawl on a piece of paper the word SORRY. Yes, that is quite possible. Then I open the drawer of the desk, take out the pistol which I keep there, load it, if it is not loaded, and then—do I proceed to shoot myself? No, I first turn my chair round—so, and I lean over a little to the right—so—and then—*then* I put the pistol to my temple and fire!"

Poirot sprang from his chair, and wheeling round, demanded, "I ask

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you, does that makes sense? *Why* turn the chair round? If, for instance, there had been a picture on the wall there, then, yes, there might be an explanation. Some portrait which a man about to die might wish to be the last thing on earth his eyes would see. But a window curtain—*ah non,* that does not make sense."

"He might have wished to look out of the window. Last view of the estate."

"My dear friend, you know that is nonsense. At eight minutes past eight it was dark—no, there must be some other explanation."

"There's only one as far as I can see. Gervase Chevenix-Gore was mad."

Poirot shook his head in a dissatisfied manner.

Major Riddle rose.

"Come," he said. "Let us go and interview the rest of the party. We may get at something that way."

After the difficulties of getting a direct statement from Lady Chevenix-Gore, Major Riddle found considerable relief in dealing with a shrewd lawyer like Oswald Forbes.

Forbes was extremely guarded and cautious in his statements, but his replies were all directly to the point.

He admitted that Sir Gervase's suicide had been a great shock to him. He should never have considered Sir Gervase the kind of man who would take his own life. He knew of no possible motive for such an act.

"Sir Gervase was not only my client, he was a very old friend. I have known him since boyhood. I should say that he had always enjoyed life."

"In the circumstances, Mr. Forbes, I must ask you to speak quite candidly. You did not know of any secret anxiety or sorrow in Sir Gervase's life?"

"No. He had minor worries, like most men, but there was nothing of a serious nature."

"No illness? No trouble between him and his wife?"

"No. Sir Gervase and Lady Chevenix-Gore were devoted to each other."

Major Riddle said cautiously, "Lady Chevenix-Gore appears to hold somewhat curious views."

Mr. Forbes smiled. "Ladies," he said, "must be allowed their fancies."

The Chief Constable went on, "You managed all Sir Gervase's legal affairs?"

"Yes, my firm, Forbes, Ogilvie and Spence, have acted for the Chevenix-Gore family for well over a hundred years."

"Were there ever any scandals in the Chevenix-Gore family?"

Mr. Forbes's eyebrows rose. "Really, I fail to understand you."

"M. Poirot, will you show Mr. Forbes the letter you showed me."

In silence Poirot handed the let-

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ter to Forbes with a little bow.

Mr. Forbes read it and his eyebrows rose still more.

"A most remarkable letter," he said. "I appreciate your question now. No, so far as my knowledge went, there was nothing to justify the writing of such a letter."

"He was accustomed to confide in you?"

"I think he relied on my judgment."

"And you have no idea as to what this letter refers?"

"I should not like to make any rash speculations."

Major Riddle appreciated the subtlety of this reply. "Now, Mr. Forbes, perhaps you can tell us how Sir Gervase has left his property."

"Certainly. To his wife, Sir Gervase left an annual income of six thousand pounds chargeable to the estate, and the choice of the Dower House or the town house in Lowndes Square, whichever she should prefer. There were, of course, several legacies and bequests, but nothing of an outstanding nature. The residue of his property was left to his adopted daughter, Ruth, on condition that, if she married, her husband should take the name of Chevenix-Gore."

"Was nothing left to his nephew, Mr. Hugo Trent?"

"Yes. A legacy of five thousand pounds."

"And I take it that Sir Gervase was a rich man?"

"He was extremely wealthy. He had a vast private fortune apart from the estate. Of course, he was not quite so well-off as in the past. Practically all invested incomes have felt the strain. Also, Sir Gervase had dropped a good deal of money over a certain company—the Paragon Synthetic Rubber Substitute in which Colonel Bury persuaded him to invest a good deal of money."

"Not very wise advice?"

Mr. Forbes sighed. "Retired soldiers are the worst sufferers when they engage in financial operations. I have found that their credulity far exceeds that of widows—and that is saying a good deal."

"But these unfortunate investments did not seriously affect Sir Gervase's income?"

"Oh, no, not seriously. He was still a very rich man."

"When was this will made?"

"Two years ago."

Poirot murmured, "This arrangement, was it not possibly a little unfair to Mr. Hugo Trent, Sir Gervase's nephew? He is, after all, Sir Gervase's nearest blood relation."

Mr. Forbes shrugged. "One has to take a certain amount of family history into account."

"Such as—?"

Mr. Forbes seemed slightly unwilling to proceed.

Major Riddle said, "You mustn't think we're unduly concerned with raking up old scandals or anything of that sort. But this letter of Sir

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Gervase's to M. Poirot has got to be explained."

"There is certainly nothing scandalous in the explanation of Sir Gervase's attitude to his nephew," said Mr. Forbes quickly. "It was simply that Sir Gervase always took his position as head of the family very seriously. He had a younger brother and sister. The brother, Anthony Chevenix-Gore, was killed in the war. The sister, Pamela, married, and Sir Gervase disapproved of the marriage. That is to say, he considered that she ought to have obtained his consent and approval before marrying. He thought that Captain Trent's family was not of sufficient prominence to be allied with a Chevenix-Gore. His sister was merely amused by his attitude. As a result, Sir Gervase has always been inclined to dislike his nephew. I think that dislike may have influenced him in deciding to adopt a child."

"There was no hope of his having children of his own?"

"No. There was a still-born child about a year after his marriage. The doctors told Lady Chevenix-Gore that she would never be able to have another child. About two years later he adopted Ruth."

Poirot asked, "And who *was* Mademoiselle Ruth? How did they come to settle upon her?"

"She was, I believe, the child of a distant connection."

"That I had guessed," said Poirot. He looked up at the wall which was hung with family portraits. "One can see that she was of the same blood—the nose, the line of the chin. It repeats itself on these walls many times."

"She inherits the temper, too," said Mr. Forbes dryly.

"So I should imagine. How did she and her adopted father get on?"

"Much as you might imagine. There was a fierce clash of wills more than once. But in spite of these quarrels I believe there was also an underlying harmony."

"Nevertheless, she caused him a good deal of anxiety?"

"Incessant anxiety. But I can assure you not to the point of causing him to take his own life."

"Ah, that, no," agreed Poirot. "One does not blow one's brains out because one has a headstrong daughter! And so Mademoiselle inherits. Sir Gervase, he never thought of altering his will?"

"Ahem!" Mr. Forbes coughed to hide a little discomposure. "As a matter of fact, I took instructions from Sir Gervase on my arrival here—two days ago, that is to say—as to the drafting of a new will."

"What's this?" Major Riddle hitched his chair a little closer. "You didn't tell us this."

Mr. Forbes said quickly, "you merely asked me what the terms of Sir Gervase's will were. I gave you the information for which you asked. The new will was not even properly drawn up, much less signed."

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"What were its provisions? They may be some guide to Sir Gervase's state of mind."

"In the main, they were the same as before, but Miss Chevenix-Gore was only to inherit on condition that she married Mr. Hugo Trent."

"Aha," said Poirot. "A very decided difference there."

"I did not approve of the clause," said Mr. Forbes. "And I felt bound to point out that it was quite possible it might be contested successfully. The Court does not look upon such conditional bequests with approval. Sir Gervase, however, was quite decided."

"And if Miss Chevenix-Gore—or, incidentally, Mr. Trent—refused to comply?"

"If Mr. Trent was not willing to marry Miss Chevenix-Gore, then the money went to her unconditionally. But if *he* was willing and *she* refused, then the money went to him instead."

"Odd business," said Major Riddel.

Poirot leaned forward. He tapped the lawyer on the knee. "But what is behind it? What was in the mind of Sir Gervase when he made that stipulation? There must have been something very definite. There must, I think, have been the image of another man—a man of whom he disapproved. I think, Mr. Forbes, that *you* must know who that man was?"

"Really, M. Poirot, I have no information."

"But you could make a guess."

"I never guess," said Mr. Forbes, and his tone was scandalized.

Removing his pince-nez, he wiped them with a silk handkerchief and inquired, "is there anything else that you desire to know?"

"At the moment, no," said the Chief Constable. "Thank you, Mr. Forbes. I should like, if I may, to speak to Miss Chevenix-Gore."

"Certainly. I think she is upstairs with Lady Chevenix-Gore."

"Oh, well, perhaps I'll have a word with—what's his name?—Burrows, first, and the family-history woman."

"They're both in the library. I will tell them."

"Hard work, that," said Major Riddle, as the lawyer left the room. "Extracting information from these old-fashioned legal wallahs takes a bit of doing. The whole business seems to me to center about the girl."

"It would seem so—yes."

"Ah, here comes Burrows."

Godfrey Burrows, the dead man's secretary, came in with a pleasant eagerness to be of use. His smile was discreetly tempered with gloom and showed only a fraction too much teeth. It seemed more mechanical than spontaneous.

"Now, Mr. Burrows, we want to ask you a few questions."

"Certainly, Major Riddle."

"Well, first and foremost, to put it quite simply, have you any ideas of

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your own about Sir Gervase's suicide?"

"Absolutely none. It was the greatest shock to me."

"You heard the shot?"

"No, I must have been in the library at the time, as far as I can make out. I came down rather early to look up a reference I wanted. The library's right the other side of the house from the study, so I shouldn't hear anything."

"Was anyone with you in the library?" asked Poirot.

"No one."

"You've no idea where the other members of the household were at that time?"

"Mostly upstairs dressing, I should imagine."

"When did you come to the drawing room?"

"Just before M. Poirot arrived. Everybody was there then—except Sir Gervase, of course."

"Did it strike you as strange that he wasn't there?"

"Yes, it did, as a matter of fact. As a rule he was always in the drawing room before the first gong sounded."

"Have you noticed any difference in Sir Gervase's manner lately? Has he been worried? Depressed?"

Godfrey Burrows considered. "No—I don't think so. A little—well, preoccupied, perhaps."

"No financial worries of any kind?"

"He was rather perturbed about the affairs of one particular company—the Synthetic Paragon Rubber Compay, to be exact."

"What did he actually say about it?"

Again Godfrey Burrows' mechanical smile flashed, and again it seemed slightly unreal.

"Well, as a matter of fact, what he said was, 'Old Bury's either a fool or a knave. A fool, I suppose. I must go easy with him for Vanda's sake.'"

"And why did he say that—for Vanda's sake?" inquired Poirot.

"Well, you see, Lady Chevenix-Gore was very fond of Colonel Bury, and he worshipped her. Followed her about like a dog."

"Sir Gervase was not jealous at all?"

"Jealous?" Burrows stared and then laughed. "Sir Gervase jealous? He wouldn't know how to go about it. Why, it would never have entered his head that anyone could ever prefer another man to him. Such a thing just couldn't be, you understand."

Poirot said gently, "You did not, I think, like Sir Gervase Chevenix-Gore very much?"

Burrows flushed. "Oh, yes, I did. At least—well, all that sort of thing strikes one as rather ridiculous nowadays."

"All what sort of thing?" asked Poirot.

"Well, the feudal motif, if you like. This worship of ancestry, this personal arrogance. Sir Gervase was a very able man in many ways,

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and had led an interesting life, but he would have been more interesting if he hadn't been so entirely wrapped up in his own egoism."

"Did his daughter agree with you there?"

Burrows flushed again, this time a deep purple. "I should imagine Miss Chevenix-Gore is quite one of the moderns! Naturally, I shouldn't discuss her father with her."

"But the moderns *do* discuss their fathers a good deal," said Poirot.

Major Riddle asked, "And there was nothing else—no other financial anxiety? Sir Gervase never spoke of having been *victimized?*"

"Victimized?" Burrows sounded astonished. "Oh, no."

"And you yourself were on good terms with him?"

"Certainly I was. Why not?"

"I am asking you, Mr. Burrows."

The young man looked sulky.

"We were on the best of terms."

"Did you know that Sir Gervase had written to M. Poirot asking him to come down here?"

"No."

"Did Sir Gervase usually write his own letters?"

"No, he nearly always dictated them to me."

"You can suggest no reason why he should have written this particular letter himself?"

"No, I can't."

"Ah!" said Major Riddle, adding smoothly, "Rather curious. When did you last see Sir Gervase?"

"Just before I went to dress for dinner. I took some letters to him for his signature."

"What was his manner then?"

"Quite normal. In fact, I should say he was feeling rather pleased with himself."

Poirot stirred a little in his chair.

"Ah?" he said. "So that was your impression, was it? That he was pleased about something. And yet, not so very long afterwards, he shoots himself. It is odd, that!"

Godfrey Burrows shrugged. "I'm only telling you my impression."

"Yes, yes, very valuable. After all, you are probably one of the last people who saw Sir Gervase alive."

"Snell was the last person to see him."

"To see him, yes, but not to speak to him."

Burrows did not reply.

Major Riddle said, "What time was it when you went up to dress for dinner?"

"About five minutes past seven."

"What did Sir Gervase do?"

"I left him in the study."

"How long did he usually take to change?"

"He usually gave himself a full three-quarters of an hour."

"Then, if dinner was at a quarter-past eight, he would probably have gone up at half-past seven at the latest?"

"Very likely."

"You yourself went to change early?"

"Yes, I thought I would change

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and then go to the library and look up the references I wanted."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

Major Riddle said, "Well, I think that's all for the moment. Will you send Miss What's-her-name in?"

Little Miss Lingard tripped in almost immediately. She was wearing several bracelets which tinkled a little as she sat down.

"This is all very—er—sad, Miss Lingard," began Major Riddle.

"Very sad indeed," said Miss Lingard decorously.

"You came to this house—when?"

"About two months ago. Sir Gervase wrote to a friend of his in the Museum—Colonel Fotheringay, it was—and Colonel Fotheringay recommended me. I have done a good deal of historical research work."

"Did you find Sir Gervase difficult to work for?"

"Oh, not really. One had to humor him a little, of course. But then I always find one has to do that with men."

With an uneasy feeling that Miss Lingard was probably humoring him at this moment, Major Riddle went on, "Your work here was to help Sir Gervase with the book he was writing?"

"Yes."

"What did that involve?"

For a moment Miss Lingard looked quite human. Her eyes twinkled as she replied, "Well, actually, you know, it involved writing the book! I looked up all the information and made notes, and arranged the material. And then, later, I revised what Sir Gervase had written."

"You must have had to exercise a good deal of tact, mademoiselle," said Poirot.

"Tact and firmness. One needs them both," said Miss Lingard.

"Sir Gervase did not resent your —er—firmness?"

"Oh, not at all. Of course, I put it to him that he mustn't be bothered with all the petty details."

"Oh, yes, I see."

"It was quite simple, really," said Miss Lingard. "Sir Gervase was perfectly easy to manage if one took him the right way."

"Now, Miss Lingard, I wonder if you know anything that can throw light on this tragedy?"

Miss Lingard shook her head.

"I'm afraid I don't. You see, naturally he wouldn't confide in me at all. I was practically a stranger. In any case, I think he was far too proud to speak to anyone of family troubles."

"But you think it *was* family troubles that caused him to take his life?"

Miss Lingard looked rather surprised.

"But of course! Is there any other suggestion?"

"You feel sure family troubles were worrying him?"

"I know that he was in great distress of mind."

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"Oh, you know that?"

"Why, of course."

"Tell me, mademoiselle, did he speak to you of the matter?"

"Not explicitly."

"What did he say?"

"Let me see. I found that he didn't seem to be taking in what I was saying—"

"One moment. *Pardon*. When was this?"

"This afternoon. We usually worked from three to five."

"Pray go on."

"As I say, Sir Gervase seemed to be finding it hard to concentrate—in fact, he said as much, adding that he had several grave matters on his mind. And he said—let me see—something like this—of course, I can't be sure of the exact words: 'It's a terrible thing, Miss Lingard, when a family has been one of the proudest in the land, that dishonor should be brought on it.'"

"And what did you say to that?"

"Oh, just something soothing. I think I said that every generation had its weaklings—that was one of the penalities of greatness—but their failings were seldom remembered by posterity."

"And did that have the soothing effect you hoped?"

"More or less. We got back to Sir Roger Chevenix-Gore. I had found a most interesting mention of him in a contemporary manuscript. But Sir Gervase's attention wandered again. In the end he said he would not do any more work this afternoon. He said he had had a shock."

"A shock?"

"That is what he said. Of course, I didn't ask any questions. I just said, 'I am sorry to hear it, Sir Gervase.' And then he asked me to tell Snell that M. Poirot would be arriving and to put off dinner until eight fifteen, and send the car to meet the seven fifty train."

"Did he usually ask you to make these arrangements?"

"Well—no—that was really Mr. Burrows' business. I did nothing but my own literary work. I wasn't a secretary in any sense of the word."

Poirot asked, "Do you think Sir Gervase had a definite reason for asking you to make these arrangements, instead of asking Mr. Burrows to do so?"

Miss Lingard considered.

"Well, he may have had, although I did not think of it at the time. I thought it was just a matter of convenience. Still, it's true now I come to think of it, that he *did* ask me not to tell anyone that M. Poirot was coming. It was to be a surprise, he said."

"Ah, he said that, did he? Very curious, very interesting. And *did* you tell anyone?"

"Certainly not, M. Poirot. I told Snell about dinner and to send the chauffeur to meet the seven fifty."

"Did Sir Gervase say anything else that may have had a bearing on the situation?"

"No, I don't think so—he was

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very much strung-up. I do remember that just as I was leaving the room, he said, 'Not that it's any good his coming now. It's too late.'"

"And you have no idea at all what he meant by that?"

"N—no."

There was just the faintest suspicion of indecision about the simple negative. Poirot repeated with a frown, "*'Too late.'*"

Major Riddle said, "You can give us no idea, Miss Lingard, as to the nature of the circumstance that so distressed Sir Gervase?"

Miss Lingard said slowly, "I have an idea that it was in some way connected with Mr. Hugo Trent."

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, it was nothing definite, but yesterday afternoon we were just touching on Sir Hugo de Chevenix—who, I'm afraid, didn't bear too good a character in the Wars of the Roses—and Sir Gervase said, 'My sister *would* choose the family name of Hugo for her son! It's always been an unsatisfactory name in our family. She might have known no Hugo would ever turn out well.'"

"What you tell us is suggestive," said Poirot. "Mademoiselle, you, a stranger, have been here for two months. It would be, I think, very valuable if you were to tell us quite frankly your impressions of the family and household."

Miss Lingard took off her pince-nez and blinked reflectively.

"Well, at first, quite frankly, I felt as though I'd walked straight into a madhouse! What with Lady Chevenix-Gore continually seeing things that weren't there, and Sir Gervase behaving like—like a king—and dramatizing himself in the most extraordinary way—well, I really did think they were the oddest people I had ever come across. Of course, Miss Chevenix-Gore is perfectly normal, and I soon found that Lady Chevenix-Gore is really an extremely kind, nice woman. Nobody could be kinder and nicer to me than she has been. Sir Gervase—well, I really think he *was* mad. His egomania—isn't that what you call it?—was getting worse and worse every day."

"And the others?"

"Mr. Burrows had rather a difficult time with Sir Gervase, I should imagine. I think he was glad that our work on the book gave him a little more breathing space. Colonel Bury was always charming. He was devoted to Lady Chevenix-Gore and he managed Sir Gervase quite well. Mr. Trent, Mr. Forbes, and Miss Cardwell have only been here a few days, so of course I don't know much about them."

"Thank you, mademoiselle. And what about Captain Lake, the agent?"

"Oh, he's very nice. Everybody liked him."

"Including Sir Gervase?"

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"Oh, yes. I've heard him say Lake was much the best agent he'd ever had. Of course, Captain Lake had his difficulties with Sir Gervase, too—but he managed pretty well on the whole. It wasn't easy."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully. He murmured, "There was something—something—that I had in mind to ask you—some little thing . . . What was it now?"

Miss Lingard turned a patient face toward him.

Poirot shook his head vexedly. "Tchah! It is on the tip of my tongue."

Major Riddle waited a minute, then as Poirot continued to frown perplexedly, he took up the interrogation once more.

"When was the last time you saw Sir Gervase?"

"At tea-time, in this room."

"What was his manner then? Normal?"

"As normal as it ever was."

"Where did Sir Gervase go after tea?"

"He took Mr. Burrows with him into the study, as usual."

"That was the last time you saw him?"

"Yes. I went to the small morning-room where I worked, and typed a chapter of the book from the notes I had gone over with Sir Gervase, until seven o'clock, when I went upstairs to rest and dress for dinner."

"You actually heard the shot, I understand?"

"Yes, I heard what sounded like a shot and I went out into the hall. Mr. Trent was there, and Miss Cardwell. Mr. Trent asked Snell if there was champagne for dinner, and made rather a joke of it. It never entered our heads to take the matter seriously, I'm afraid."

Poirot said, "Did you hear Mr. Trent say, 'There's always murder'?"

"I believe he did say something like that—joking, of course."

"What happened next?"

"We all came in here."

"Can you remember the order in which the others came down to dinner?"

"Miss Chevenix-Gore was the first, I think, and then Mr. Forbes. Then Colonel Bury and Lady Chevenix-Gore together, and Mr. Burrows immediately after them. I think that was the order, but I can't be quite sure because they more or less came in all together."

"Gathered by the sound of the first gong?"

"Yes. Everyone always hustled when they heard that first gong. Sir Gervase was a terrible stickler for punctuality in the evening."

"What time did he himself usually come down?"

"He was nearly always in the room before the first gong sounded."

"Did it surprise you that he was not down on this occasion?"

"Very much."

"Ah, I have it!" cried Poirot.

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As the other two looked inquiringly at him, he went on, "I have remembered what I wanted to ask. This evening, mademoiselle, as we all went along to the study on Snell's reporting it to be locked, you stooped and picked something up."

"I did?" Miss Lingard seemed very surprised.

"Yes, just as we turned into the straight passage to the study. Something small and bright."

"How extraordinary—I don't remember. Wait a minute—yes, I do. Only I wasn't thinking. Let me see—it must be in here."

Opening her black satin bag, she poured the contents on a table.

Poirot and Major Riddle surveyed the collection with interest. There were two handkerchiefs, a powder compact, a small bunch of keys, a spectacle case, and one other object on which Poirot pounced eagerly.

"A bullet, by Jove!" said Major Riddle.

The thing was indeed shaped like a bullet, but it proved to be a small pencil.

"That's what I picked up," said Miss Lingard. "I'd forgotten all about it."

"Do you know who this belongs to, Miss Lingard?"

"Oh, yes, it's Colonel Bury's. He had it made out of a bullet that hit him—or rather, didn't hit him, if you know what I mean—in the South African War."

"Do you know when he had it last?"

"Well, he had it this afternoon because I noticed him writing with it on the score pad when I came in to tea."

"Who was playing bridge?"

"Colonel Bury, Lady Chevenix-Gore, Mr. Trent, and Miss Cardwell."

"I think," said Poirot gently, "we will keep this and return it to the Colonel ourselves."

"Oh, please do. I am so forgetful, I might not remember to do so."

"Perhaps, mademoiselle, you would be so good as to ask Colonel Bury to come here now?"

"Certainly. I will go and find him at once."

She hurried away. Poirot got up and began walking aimlessly round the room.

"We begin," he said, "to reconstruct the afternoon. It is interesting. At half-past two Sir Gervase goes over accounts with Captain Lake. *He is slightly preoccupied.* At three, he discusses the book he is writing with Miss Lingard. *He is in great distress of mind.* Miss Lingard associates that distress of mind with Hugo Trent on the strength of a chance remark. At tea-time *his behavior is normal.* After tea, Godfry Burrows tells us *he was in good spirits over something.* At five minutes to eight he comes downstairs, goes to his study, scrawls *'Sorry'* on a sheet of paper, and shoots himself!"

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Riddle said slowly, "I see what you mean. It isn't consistent."

"Strange alternations of moods in Sir Gervase Chevenix-Gore! He is preoccupied—he is seriously upset—he is normal—he is in high spirits! There is something very curious here. And then that phrase he used, *'Too late.'* That I should get here 'Too late.' Well, it is true, that. I *did* get here too late—*to see him alive.*"

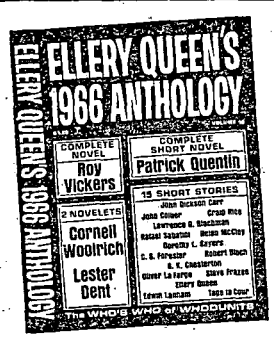
"I see. You really think—?"

"I shall never know now why Sir Gervase sent for me."

Poirot was still wandering round the room. He straightened one or two objects on the mantelpiece; he examined a card table that stood against a wall; he opened the drawer of it and took out the bridge score pad.

Then he wandered over to the writing table and peered into the wastepaper basket. There was nothing in it but a paper bag. Poirot took it out, smelled it, murmured, "Oranges," and flattened it out, reading the name on it. "Carpenter and Sons, Fruiterers, Hamborough St. Mary."

(continued on page 108)



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Edward D. Hoch is capable of writing a truly classic short story. He proved that with his unforgettable "I'd Know You Anywhere," published in the October 1963 issue of EQMM. And now—will you agree? —he proves it again . . .

THE ODOR OF MELTING

by EDWARD D. HOCH

THE THING HE REMEMBERED MOST vividly from that last instant before the plane hit the cresting Atlantic waves was the odor of melting, the pungent wisp of a smell which told him the electric circuits had gone. Then there was no time for anything else—no time to reach the passenger compartment, no time for anything but a clawing endeavor to survive.

He couldn't have lived long in the freezing waters, but it seemed that he bobbed like Ishmael for days, the only survivor of this black disaster, clinging to one of the plane's seats until at last some unseen hands were lifting him. Perhaps he was bound for heaven, or for hell. He no longer cared. He merely slipped into a quiet slumber where the dreams were thick and deep, like the waters of the Atlantic . . .

When he opened his eyes, some time later, a man in white slacks and a white turtleneck sweater was bending over him. He was aware of the man's face, and of the coolness of the sheets against his naked body, and nothing more.

"How do you feel?" the man asked.

"I—I don't know. I expected to be dead. Where am I?"

The man smiled and felt the pilot's forehead. "We saw the crash and pulled you out of the water. You're very lucky. It's an awfully big ocean."

Now he was aware of the gentle swaying of the room, and he knew he was on a boat of some sort. "What ship is this?" he asked.

"The yacht Indos." The man smiled at the pilot's blank expression. "Owned by J. P. Galvan. Perhaps you've heard of him."

He tried to connect the name with something in his memory, and then suddenly everything else flooded back. "The President!" he gasped. "The President was on the plane! I must—"

He was struggling to get out of bed, but the man restrained him. "You were the only survivor. There is nothing you can do now."

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"How long have I been here?"

"You've been sleeping. It's almost seven hours since we pulled you from the water."

"But . . . my God, I've got to get word to Washington!"

"That's been taken care of. They know you're here."

"But the President! I've got to tell them what happened. I was the pilot—it was my responsibility!"

"Rest for a while. Mr. Galvan will want to speak with you soon." The man turned and went out, perhaps to summon the owner of the yacht.

Alone between the cool white sheets, he ran over the whole thing again in his mind. He'd been the chief pilot of the presidential plane for only six months when the President of the United States decided on a flying trip to France and West Germany. The visit, and the high-level talks that accompanied it, had been most successful. The President and his advisors had been pleased when they finally boarded the plane in Paris for the return flight.

They were more than an hour out to sea when it happened, suddenly and without warning. An autumn storm blowing up from the tropics—perhaps an offshoot of some distant hurricane—had hurled a single lightning bolt at the plane, knocking out the radio and electrical systems. It was a freak accident that shouldn't have happened; but it did.

He remembered then the odor of melting as the plastic insulation began to go, remembered even seeing the yacht, a single speck on the vast expanse of storm-tossed waves. Suddenly the plane would no longer function. It was a dead thing, dead beneath his prodding hands.

He had screamed something at his copilot, frantically pressing every emergency button within reach. They'd got the auxiliary radio transmitter to function for a few seconds, but he'd only managed a brief gasping of words—"Going down, rush help!"—before that too fizzled into a spectrum of sparks.

He remembered the water, and then nothing else until now. "How long was I in there?" he asked the man in slacks when he returned. "It seemed like hours."

"We had you out in about twenty minutes."

"No one else?"

The man shook his head. "No one else." He offered him a cigarette and added, "Mr. Galvan is coming down to talk to you."

"Fine." The cigarette tasted good. "Are you Mr. Galvan's son?"

"Nothing so important. I'm only his secretary. You may call me—" he hesitated, then finished, "Martin."

The cabin door opened and a small, middle-aged man entered. He wore a dark-blue nautical jacket with brass buttons, and a captain's cap that seemed oddly out of place above his thin, pale features. "You would be John Harris, the pilot of

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the plane," he said without preliminaries. "I am J. P. Galvan."

He partly lifted himself from the bunk to shake the man's hand. Memory stirred again, and this time it was a magazine article he'd read some time back. J.P. Galvan, international banker, a man who gloried in the power to manipulate fortunes in world currency. "Thank you for saving me," he said.

"It was nothing. A stroke of luck on your part, that the plane came down so close to my yacht. But I was sorry for the others. Your President—a fine man."

"Do you have a radio I could listen to? I'd like to know what they're saying."

Galvan nodded and sat down beside the bunk. "All in due course. First, tell me what happened."

The yacht had begun a gentle rocking and Harris was aware for the first time that the engines had been cut. He wondered why. He wondered if they were perhaps preparing to shift him to a larger ship, possibly an American warship that had reached the search area.

"The electrical system failed," he told Galvan, going through the story as he remembered it, reliving once more the unexpected fury of the brief storm. "There was no chance to save the President, or even get off a radio message."

Galvan smiled slightly. "Oh, but you did get off a message, Mr. Harris."

"What?"

"Your new President—who has already been sworn into office—is under the impression that the plane was shot down by the Russians."

"What!" He sat up in the bunk again, this time with a sudden cold sweat forming over his body. "How could he think that?"

"They picked up a few garbled words. *Russians* was the only one they understood."

He thought back to that hasty final message. *Rush help* could have sounded like *Russians* in the static of the storm-swept airwaves. "But that's terrible! That could start a war!"

"Exactly," Galvan agreed.

"I've got to use your radio at once! I have to get the truth to Washington!"

But the small man restrained him. "There is plenty of time for that. Your new President took the oath of office almost immediately, even though the search for survivors still continues. I am most anxious to see how he handles the situation."

"How he handles it! We could be at war any minute now, and the President might be powerless to prevent a nuclear holocaust."

Galvan sighed. "Mr. Harris, my business is power. I have made a career out of the skillful manipulation of moneys. Don't you see? I have in my hands now the greatest single power a man has ever had! I have the power to stop World War III, or to let it proceed."

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Harris rolled over on the bunk, sweating freely now. "That's crazy talk! It couldn't have gone that far yet."

"No?" Galvan motioned to his secretary. "Turn on the speaker for the short-wave radio."

The secretary vanished for a moment and then reappeared as a hidden wall speaker suddenly came to life. ". . . no further word. Meanwhile, the great Atlantic search continues. A hundred aircraft and two dozen ships have now converged on the general area in which the President's plane went down. Some bits of wreckage *have* been sighted, but there is no trace of survivors at this hour. Meanwhile, in Washington, both houses of Congress have gone into an extraordinary all-night session to hear an urgent address by the new President. It is expected that the President will attempt to calm those who are calling for an immediate declaration of war with Russia. But on the basis of the presidential pilot's last words before the crash, it is becoming obvious that the pressures of an aroused public could plunge the United States and Russia into war within another twenty-four hours. Moscow has denied all knowledge of the missing plane, but it is known that Russian fishing boats were in the vicinity. Now for a direct report from . . ."

"We've got to stop them," Harris interrupted from the bunk. "We've got to—"

Galvan signaled the secretary to turn off the speaker. "You see, Mr. Harris, that is my problem. *Should* I stop them?"

For the first time he felt the fear—not only for the others, but for himself. "What do you mean? I can stop them if you won't. You told them you'd rescued me." Overhead somewhere, one of the search planes dipped low and then climbed again. It was the first one he'd heard. *"You did tell them, didn't you?"*

Galvan blinked and stepped closer to the bunk. "We have told them nothing, Mr. Harris. The crew does not understand English. Only the three of us know you are here. There has been no radio communication with the searchers."

The pilot slumped back on his pillow, knowing now, yet not quite knowing all of it. "What do you plan to do?"

"I have been in touch with bankers in London, Rome, Rio, and Paris. There is much to be said for letting the war—this long-postponed confrontation—take place at last. Your Presidents have been men of peace, and even the Russians have shown no eagerness for world conflict. An event like this, today, is needed to plunge the world into chaos."

"You want that?"

"I do not know, Mr. Harris. It might be more profitable for me to buy and sell against the market, realizing that I could produce your evidence at the last possible moment—"

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"But this *is* the last possible moment," he told Galvan. "Once the first missile is launched, by either side, it will be too late."

There was an insistent buzzing of a signal from somewhere, and the man in slacks went off to answer it, moving smoothly and silently out of view. When he returned, he spoke to Galvan in a language Harris couldn't understand.

The small man grunted and turned back to the bunk. "An American ship has hailed us—a bit sooner than I expected. I must tell them about you now, or not at all."

Looking up at Galvan, Harris already knew the decision. The owner of the yacht could not now allow him to live, to give even a hint to the waiting world of this fantastic conversation. "You're mad," he said, very quietly.

"Do you think those who are calling for war—do you think they are sane?"

"There's no money in it for you if the whole world goes up in smoke."

Galvan blinked and turned away. "Perhaps I am only tired of the indecision of it all."

"Or mad with the power of this moment." He waited no longer, but threw back the sheet and hurled himself across the cabin at the little man. He grabbed him by the neck and was tightening his grip on the wrinkled throat when the secretary drew a pistol and fired a single shot at close range.

Harris stumbled backward, seeing the two of them—the only two in the world who knew—suddenly tall above him, and he felt very tired as his life drained away. Again there came to him the unmistakable odor of melting, and he wondered if perhaps he was back in the dead plane, if all that went between had been but a drowning man's dream . . .

Or was this the way the earth smelled, as it died?

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NEW crime NOVELET — à la Black Mask

Gabe, "a big mon," ex-heavyweight pug, ex-racketeer, had a big deal all set up on the island of Antilla in the West Indies—a really big job that could be worth a million bucks; and it was fat—juicy-ripe for the picking. He needed a top box mon, a cool-cat actor mon, and a strongarm punk. The caper was the dream of a crook's lifetime—sure-fire, foolproof, a pushover—ready and waiting to go, mon, go . . .

THE JUICY MANGO CAPER

by ED LACY

THE DINGY PAINT STORE IN THE teeming tenement neighborhood grossed an average of $19,000 weekly. And asking to buy a can of paint could easily get your wiseguy mouth busted.

A tall and cool-eyed young Negro named Ace stood behind the counter, gazing out the dusty window at the passing people sweating on this very hot June afternoon. There was an open microphone under the counter, a kind of homemade intercom system, and now Ace said loudly, "Boss, Big Gabe's outside, coming this way."

Jerry looked older than 41 because of his receding hairline. Lean and wiry, his pale, pockmarked face crowded with sharp features, Jerry was intense and ambitious; he'd taken mail-order accounting courses to help him become a "numbers controller." He said into the clock-mike on his neat desk, "Gabe? You sure, kid?"

"Yeah. He's crossing the street now. Whatcha want me to do, Boss?"

"Relax. Gabe has nothing against me." But Jerry covered the .32 automatic in his open top drawer with some of the adding machine tape he'd been double-checking.

The baggy, tropical tan suit blended with Big Gabe's dark brown face. His large, shaved head rested on a wrinkled bullneck and he carried 230 pounds on his 6-foot frame, only a dozen pounds more than when Gabe had been a fair-to-middling heavyweight many years ago. The extra pounds were mostly around his thick middle, but the thick shoulders were still clean, and despite his 62 years Big Gabe walked with pigeon-toed erectness.

Entering the store, Gabe smiled at Ace, glanced at the dirty paint cans on the dusty shelves, and said with a soft West Indian accent,

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"Business must be lousy. I had these same cans when the store was mine, four years ago. Jerry in?"

Ace nodded. As Gabe strode toward the curtained rear doorway, Ace suddenly raced ahead of him, then started to run his hands over Gabe's wide body in a quick frisk.

Startled and amused, Gabe said, "Boy, you been watching too much TV. Never put hands on me or you take back stumps!" Pushing Ace aside, he stepped into the back room, waved at Jerry. "Got you an eager-beaver boy here. I don't want to hurt him. Seems I recall the face. You Miss Lucy's lad, no?"

Ace nodded sullenly as Jerry motioned for him to return to the front of the store. Shaking Gabe's meaty hand, Jerry said, "You're looking great—the islands must agree with you. Funny, you been in my mind, Gabe. No bull. My kid likes this mango fruit. They grow them in the West Indies, don't they?"

"De mango tree grow all over the islands."

"Sit down, Gabe. You want a belt?"

"Naw."

For a moment the two men studied each other—guarded, curious stares. Then Gabe asked, "How's business?"

"Okay. About the same as when you were banking it. Got me a few good runners and Ace is okay, no record."

"But he'll have one, soon as somebody has to stand still for a rap," Gabe said.

Jerry frowned, glancing at the clock-mike. "Guess he knows that's part of what I'm paying him for. We all got to take a fall. Are you back in the States for a visit, Gabe?" Jerry almost said, "Boss."

"I come just to have talk with you."

"You kidding?" Jerry's right hand rested on the open drawer.

Gabe glanced at the drawer and grinned, his false teeth gleaming-white in his dark face: "You always bit of a nit, Jerry. What else friends do but talk; mon?"

"Sure, Gabe, sure."

Gabe reached over the desk and covered the clock-mike with a large brown hand. "You still on rubber, boy?"

"Yeah, got a new Caddy. Why?"

"At seven p.m., when you get your business straightened for the day, I be waiting on the corner. Talk is best in a car—nobody overhear us. Be alone."

Jerry hesitated. "I don't know about tonight, Gabe. I've got something lined up."

Still covering the desk mike, Gabe laughed. "Mon, you sound frightened. Look, I run this store for many years, until the protection payoff came too high. Maybe you and the syndicate arrange for the cops to raise the payoff. Maybe not. I know, since the syndicate pay off directly downtown, their ice is less for a drop like this store. Also, pos-

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sible you give the syndicate the idea while you work for me. Also, maybe not. That's the way the racket goes. If I could have taken over one of their places, I would have. What I say is, no bad feelings, Jerry. I fly two thousand miles just to see you about a favor."

"Of course no hard feelings. But Gabe, you know I'm working on a straight percentage. I can give you a few bucks but—"

"Mon, you think I fly all the way up here for a handout? No, we do *each other* a favor. I have a deal—a big one. But this not for the syndicate, only you and me. Understand?"

"Yeah." Jerry rubbed his balding forehead. "How big is this—uh—favor?"

"We talk more when I see you at seven. This the *big* one, Jerry—a juicy mango waiting to be picked. At seven, mon?"

"Sure. Hey, Gabe, I remember you were a lover. If you want me to get you something for tonight—?"

Gabe got to his feet. "Mon, all I take to the bed tonight be a newspaper to read myself to sleep."

Jerry laughed. "Since when did you become such a reader?"

"Since I become *old* mon. Don't forget our fat mango. See you."

Jerry was the punctual type. Each day he finished counting the take of his runners and paid off the few winners by 5:30 p.m. sharp. He had a cute babe living in a modern apartment and Jerry would go there to relax and have a few drinks before going home to his family. The girl and the apartment were both new and secret, so he was astonished on leaving her place and unlocking his car to see Big Gabe step out of a shadow.

"What is this, Gabe? I swear I didn't have a thing to do with you losing the store or—"

"Oh, mon, still the mouth. I only be sure we alone. Let's take the ride while I talk."

"How did you know where to find me?" Jerry asked as they got into the car. Touching the side of the driver's seat, he felt the reassuring butt of a small .22 automatic he always carried.

"What does that matter? This no time for small talk. I have a half-a-million-buck deal waiting to be plucked, mon."

"H-half a m-million?"

"Could be more—maybe a million. Listen close, mon. I from Antilla, one of the smaller islands. When I booted out here, I go back home, buy me a house and some land. Antilla, she always been a poor island, which is why I leave when I young stud. It still poor. The U.S. give some money aid but you know how that shake out: it end up in the pockets of politicians and people get nothing. I open an agency for refrigerators but the people too poor to buy. I try other business deals—big nothing."

"You're broke? I always

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thought you left with a fat bundle?" Jerry turned into the heavy traffic of River Drive. Until he was sure of Gabe, traffic would be an effective shield.

"I still got me house and land, but I not return to Antilla to end up old man in want. Now listen: the island government try to attract the Yankee tourist, let hotels be built tax-free. In the winter season they do business, but now, in the summer heat, the island dead. Keep that in mind, Jerry—it important. Also for the tourist, the government let a gambling casino stay open. Don't worry, Jerry, I check—not owned by your syndicate people.

"Since the casino not wanted by the church or the island opposition party, government put it in an isolated part of the island. Of course, all Antilla no more than forty miles across. In the summer the casino maybe have six or seven suckers all night. But in the winter, it packed. I learn interesting fact: casino pay the government $80,000 a year for permit, plus a percentage of the take. But the—"

"Eighty grand off the top? They need plenty of action to cover that big a bite."

"What I been telling you, mon? This is *big!* The mob running it been lying about their take—to trim the percentage. But they can't bank the money or take it out of Antilla—government keep strict watch on *that.* You see how this add up? A casino in an isolated place with only three young punks in charge of some island boys working as dealers, and half a million or a million waiting in the safe—like a fat mango to be picked."

Jerry brushed his sweaty forehead again. "How come only three hoods?"

"Only three because they don't expect trouble—crime unknown in Antilla. I figure four good men and myself do the job. One mon I already have. But I been out of touch for years, which is why I come to you, Jerry. I need a top safe mon, a strongarm joker, and another musclemon who has to be real sharp—an actor. And have to be sure of their wives, too."

"Wives? Why are dames in this?"

"The important angle is each mon and wife must pass for tourists. We don't want bums, junkies, loudmouths, or boozers. I think best we give 'em straight cut—$5000 for the joker, $10,000 for the can opener, and the same for the cool musclemon, the actor. Me, I already invest $1400 for helicopter and—"

"The what?"

"Jerry, I give this much thought: when I finish, ask all the bloody questions you want. Now, casino open every night from ten to four a.m. There is two punks on the floor all the time. The casino used to be the governor's summer house when Antilla under the English.

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There's a serving pantry outside the main ballroom and in there sits the third goon, with a carbine. Keep in mind, when they close at four a.m. during the summer, they lucky to have couple of players.

"Now, Antilla only hundred miles south of Cuba, nearer the other Leeward Islands. I have former Cuban pilot waiting on another island. Through him I buy a small helicopter which I stash on deserted islet few miles off my house. You ever read the travel ads?"

"No, I ain't going no place."

"Read 'em. The airlines have these package tours to the islands, including Antilla. Off season, for about $250 you fly there, stay in a hotel for six nights, fly back. That means we need $25,000 to pay off the three men I want you to get and another grand for expenses. I think you can put up $26,000."

"I might raise it," Jerry mumbled.

"Listen close: let us say we set stickup for Wednesday night. The Friday before, the sharp musclemon arrives with his wife on a package tour, go to a hotel. Saturday the box mon and his wife arrive at another hotel. Wednesday morning the punk planes in, but he only staying the night—what they call island hopping; another package deal. For the moment we forget him.

"The two hotels are on the beach, less than mile from my place. Every night the men go to bed early with their wives. The hotels have guest cottages and each night at eleven p.m., the men sneak over to my place, for practice. That be easy, Antilla is dark and dead at night. The main angle is, they do nothing to attract attention to themselves in the hotels—they act the tired tourist.

"The smart musclemon, he the key to my plan. Every night he dye his hair or use a wig, disguise face, and give the casino a little play. But all under a phony name, using a courtesy card from another hotel, which I get for him. He acts de rich Cuban exile, gambles for an hour, then leaves. Now, we come to Wednesday night. You follow the action so far?"

Jerry nodded, his eyes on the traffic, his busy brain already picking out the men.

"Other strongarm mon, he arrive Wednesday morning. At midnight he and the box mon wait at my place. After I drive the cool-cat musclemon to the casino, I return to drive strongarm mon and box mon to the casino, where we hide in a field, masked and ready. After we cut the phone wires, he mon inside the casino must take out the riflemon in the pantry. The little 'copter lands with much noise and the rest of us rush in. While we throw guns on the casino hoods and any customers, the box mon opens the safe. He can even blow it apart—this house so far out no-

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body hear. The pilot and me, we talk a lot of Spanish, so—"

"They'll think we're Cubans. Gabe, what about the getaway?"

"Oh, mon, that the *first* thing I plan. In fifteen-twenty minutes we tie up the hoods and leave with the half million. All the time the pilot he keep shouting about the plane ready. But we four go by my car, as the 'copter take off with a roar. The pilot, he ditch 'copter at sea, near anchored rowboat. Meantime I drive, by backroads, to my house, then others walk to their hotel cottages, get up in de morning like nothing happen. The police figure we all fly to Cuba. That is it, mon."

Turning off to park in a quiet side street Jerry said, "Well, you sort of lost me at the end. What happens to the loot?"

"I bury it near my house. A few hours later, same Thursday morning, his six-night tour up, the actor-musclemon and wife leave for the States. The punk also takes a plane that morning, to another island, per his island-hopping tour. The box mon and his wife leave Friday. By then the parts of the helicopter be found at sea and the police think we all dead. After a month or so, you come back to Antilla as tourist and I give you your share. We split fifty-fifty. Okay?"

Jerry shrugged, a gesture meaning nothing.

Big Gabe rubbed his big hands. "Jerry, this is perfect setup, if we trust each other. Me, I too old to be on the run and why should I even try to be the pig? A quarter of a million will last my remaining years. You cross me, or I cross you, one letter to the Antilla government or to the mob backing the casino, we finished. This we also drill into the punks—they ever open their mouth, the mob owning the casino sure to kill 'em.

"Another angle: the casino can't even make too much of stink or they admit holding out on the Antilla government. Jerry, you put up the dough, get me the right punks, and we both rich. Of course they only tell their wives what they have to. Be a good deal for the women, too, a paid vacation. That's about all. Wait, you pay the punks here, in front, in case the Antilla police try searching all tourists leaving the island, which hardly happen. That's the deal. You buying in?"

"What about this Cuban pilot?"

"Him, I pay off." Gabe chuckled. "He is supposed to wreck 'copter before jumping for anchored rowboat. I aim to help him along. When he take off from the casino I stick time bomb in his plane. Mon, it truly exploded! And one less hand to worry about."

"You positive all this quiet money is waiting in the safe?"

Gabe laughed again. "Mon, would I start this if I wasn't *very* sure?"

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"How many island men work in the casino?"

"Don't worry about them—they ain't armed and they not going to die for no casino. They be so frightened, be no problem. We can take care of the three casino goons easy, but I don't want any shooting, if we can help it. Of course the box mon, he has to be the best in the business."

"Tom Morris is a top cracker," Jerry said, as if thinking aloud. "He's about fifty, nice appearance, hasn't been doing anything for months. Tom can be trusted. For the punk, there's an ex-pug and college footballer named Ed Facit. He's good. I don't know if he's married but—"

"Does he look like a pug?"

"Naw. Strictly the clean-cut college boy. Ed did a little time a few years ago, otherwise he's got no record. As for the—uh—actor, the big deal in this operation, I know a joker with brains and guts, the perfect guy for the job. Me."

Gabe tried not to grin. "They give you time off from the store?"

"Sure. I haven't had a vacation in three years. I'll take off a week and the wife will go for the bit. Maybe we'll take our kid too—she's twelve and smart."

"No kids—they'd ask too many questions. Jerry, take your time, ask around for the right punks, without telling anything. And no syndicate in this—the deal only for us. I meet you again in two days and we talk over final plans. And not a word to the syndicate—understand, mon?"

Jerry sneered. "With a quarter of a million who needs the mob's penny-ante numbers job?"

Mrs. Maria Morris was still pretty for her 39 years, even with the touches of gray in her black hair. She had returned to sewing in a dress factory, almost glad that Tom had had a heart attack. Maria didn't mind working and it gave her a sense of security knowing he was in bed and couldn't possibly get into trouble. Maria had married Tom when she was 16 and never regretted it; but the two "jolts" that Tom had done in prison had been nightmares. The first had resulted in a miscarriage during her only pregnancy.

Entering their small tenement flat, her arms full of groceries and the evening papers, Maria became hysterical on finding Tom's bed empty. "Oh, God! Tom's had another attack and called an ambulance!" she thought, rushing for the phone. Then she saw the note in his neat handwriting.

Hon: I'll be home soon. Everything okay. Love.
Tom.

The note only increased her anxiety. The doctor's strict orders were that Tom should remain in bed for another month. He might walk to the bathroom, but climbing the

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three flights to their apartment, any strenuous activity, was out.

Maria sat there, too numbed to put the groceries away, sweating in the muggy heat, seeing her Tom on the sidewalk, gasping out his final breath. When their life at last seemed smooth and peaceful, he had to go out like a fool on some stupid—

Hearing slow steps on the stairs, Maria flung open the door as Tom stepped into the living room, panting, his pale face sweating. He collapsed on the couch and she ran for his pills. For long minutes he lay there, seemingly unconscious. Frantically Maria opened his belt, loosened his tie, took off his shoes. When she started to dial for the doctor, Tom opened his glassy eyes and whispered, "No, hon. I'm okay. Those damn stairs flattened me but I'm all right now."

"Tom, are you crazy, going out? Are you trying to make me sick with worry? Oh, Tom!" She knelt by the couch, sobbing.

Stroking her hair, he said softly, "Come on now, would I make the world's most beautiful woman sick? Hon, I got a call, a job."

"A job? Are you out of your mind? You can't take a job. And I thought all that was over, that we'd decided—"

He held slim fingers across her lips. With color creeping back into his lean face, she was aware of how handsome he looked: the old mixture of delicate features and rugged, manly chin. He said, "Maria, I'm only trying to help us. Nobody knows about my heart attack and we keep it that way, a secret. This is an easy one, with ten big bills in advance as my cut, no matter what happens."

"Tom, for the love of God, are you nuts? I'm working, we don't need more money, and I don't want to become a widow! You promised to quit and—"

"Easy, hon, and no tears. I know what I promised and neither am I anxious to kick off. But let's face a few facts—things I've been thinking about all these months in bed.

"When I'm able to get about, we'll have to move; I can't take these damn stairs. That means more rent and I'm not even on Social Security—so what am I supposed to do, honey, sit around like a bum for the rest of my life? This —now, wait until I finish. This job is a cinch—no strain or rough stuff —and with ten grand we can make the down payment on a house, rent out the top floor, and in the basement I'll open a shop and do TV and watch repairs. You know I'm good with my hands. It will not only give us an income, but I put myself on Social Security so that in a dozen years we both get a little something each month, plus having a house all paid for by then.

"Also there's a surprise kicker for you—we're going down to the West Indies for a week! Think of

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that, our first real vacation. The change, the sunshine, will be a tonic for the both of us."

Maria stopped weeping. "The West Indies? Tom, what are you talking about?"

He told her as much as he thought she ought to know about the caper to rob the Antilla gambling casino.

Although brawn always seemed to determine Ed Facit's destiny, he wasn't a dope. When he was a 12-year-old on his aunt's farm, Ed was so big that by lying about his age he was able to cross the county and work on a road-repair gang all summer. By the time he was 18, his 200 solid pounds heralded a bright future: Ed was the best running back ever to make the All State High School Team, and colleges swamped him with offers of scholarships. His muscles had also taken him to Chicago to become a Golden Gloves heavyweight champ.

College was a dream where the tall and boyish Ed cut a splendid figure in either a football or ROTC uniform. While his football scholarship covered the necessities of college life, it didn't leave much money for playing around and the co-eds were frantic about Ed. As a member of the pistol team, Ed had a key to the ROTC gun locker and one day he pawned a few old guns, figuring to have them back in a week when his monthly check for sweeping out the gym would come in. Ed had a hot date and he needed the money. It turned out to be a bigger date than expected: he got a year and a day for stealing U.S. Government property.

Ed's education continued in the pen, but along different lines. He was 21 when he was released and not too worried about the future—his fast hands had outboxed pros in the jail. But the fight game was dead and after a hungry year Ed gave it up to become a bar bouncer, then a bodyguard for a member of the syndicate. Since Ed wasn't a dummy, he fully realized there was little future in this, but with his jail record there wasn't anything else he could do.

Then to complicate his life, Ed met a nice young schoolteacher, Janice, and wanted to marry her. Her folks didn't think much of Ed and kept telling Janice she was only infatuated with his looks and size. Not wanting to marry while still in the rackets, Ed didn't press matters. Janice had some vague idea Ed was a freelance salesman.

But $5,000 changed the picture: he could return to school, learn a trade. That night he told Janice about his doing time—the reason he'd cooled their relationship. When she recovered from the first shock, she cried and snuggled into his strong arms and swore she'd stick by him.

Ed told her, "Sweet, I want you to *really* think this through. I only told you about my past because if

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you truly want to, we can be married in about ten days. I've swung a big deal on a West Indian island —sold them a load of surplus wire and my commission will be $5000, enough to carry us while I learn the plumbing trade. A fellow I played ball with is in his father's contracting business, says he'll give me a break. I want you to plane down to Jamaica, where we'll be married and have a honeymoon. Since you'll be starting your summer vacation, it all jells—*if* you want to marry me."

Janice's answer was a fierce kiss. "Oh, Ed, I can't believe it! Wait till I tell my folks! They said you'd never ask. Ed, can't we get married now, so I can go to this island with you?"

"No, I'll be rushing around like mad on business. Best we do it like this: I'll buy the tickets and you'll jet out of here on a Thursday morning, be in Kingston that afternoon. I'll be waiting at the airport and we'll be married right away, then take a slow honeymoon swing through the islands."

Ed was thinking how really smooth things were working out—they didn't even need passports to travel to the West Indies.

Maria Morris fell in love with Antilla the moment she heard a steel band playing as they stepped off the jet on Saturday. Tom had flatly refused to let her even ask the doctor if a jet flight could be dangerous for a cardiac. But the four-hour flight had been so quiet that Tom had slept peacefully all the way.

The Pink Sands Hotel turned out to be a row of modern cottages surrounding a large swimming pool, with the clear Caribbean and a sandy beach a dozen feet from their veranda. The only other guests were a retired English couple and a dark-skinned professor from Trinidad on "holiday." Except for a polite good morning, the other guests kept to themselves.

For Maria it seemed like a movie set come to life: red flamboyant trees outside her door, coconut palms waving with the breeze around the pool, pink hibiscus flowers everywhere. Tiny green lizards raced about, while at breakfast the waiter put brown sugar in conch shells hanging from the ceiling so that noisy and colorful little sugarbirds could flock around the shells to eat. The dry heat agreed with Tom, who rested on a plastic lounge near the pool most of the day. They both took on a healthy tan and Maria loved to explore the beach, fascinated by the many shells and bits of coral.

They retired at 9:00 p.m., but at 11:00 p.m. Tom left each night to walk slowly across a flat field to Big Gabe's house. It was only a 20-minute walk but he left early because he stopped every few yards to wait for the tension in his chest to ease. He found it restful to gaze

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at a sky so full of stars, hear the tiny noises of the night, the movement of coconut crabs. Maria had wanted to go with him but that was impossible. He returned at about 2:00 a.m. and then they both slept soundly.

Jerry and his wife, Carla, a silent and hard-faced little blonde, arrived on Friday at the Rum Barrel, a swank hotel about a mile the other side of Gabe's house. Carla knew how Jerry made his living and couldn't care less—as long as it paid for her foreign sports car, her expensive clothes, and a ritzy private school for their daughter. In her own cold way she now was having a ball; she and Jerry hadn't spent so much time together in years and Carla almost thought of it as a second honeymoon.

Jerry acted like a tired businessman. He loved to sit on the beach, resting and sipping a rum drink. He had decided he was for traveling; with his share of the casino loot he'd give Carla ten grand, then take off for a slow trip around the world with his young chick, spending a couple of years really living.

Wearing a dark wig and blue glasses, with cotton padding flattening his thin nose, with a scar painted on one cheek, and dressed in European clothes, Jerry walked with a limp and thoroughly enjoyed his role. He had already visited the casino twice. Talking with a mild Spanish accent, flashing a modest roll, he had casually let it be known that he was one Jose Davila, a wealthy Cuban exile. Gabe had furnished him with a courtesy card under that name from another hotel and had driven him to and from the casino.

One night Big Gabe had strolled into the casino, dropped a few dollars "Bee-Wee"—meaning West Indian bucks—at the dice table and had, of course, paid no attention to Jerry. Both Jerry and Gabe always visited the casino at around 2:00 a.m., after first meeting Tom in Gabe's house. Gabe had a modest stone bungalow; the cook and houseboy always went home at 8:00 p.m.

Each midnight, with a layout of the casino on the table before them, the three men went over their plans again and again, searching for flaws. Jerry said, "This will be a pushover—the two floormen, the gunman in the pantry, all so much nothing. They keep the back door to the pantry open, because of the heat, so I'll be able to take that hood out with no trouble. I had a glimpse of the office—the safe looks like a new box."

Gabe stressed, "When we're in action, nobody talk if they can help it, and remember, we never speak plain English. We call each other *amigo* and when the pilot or me rattles off Spanish, you just nod and answer, *'Si, si.'* We be all in black—masks, long-sleeve shirts, and gloves, dark windbreakers.

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The pilot due here Tuesday night —fishing boat put him ashore on Rat Island, de barren islet out in bay. The 'copter is stashed out there in old locked shed used by navy during the war. Tom, you fixed up okay?"

"Aha. The electric drill you bought is fine. I'm making soup, in case we need to blast the safe open."

"Good," Gabe said, nodding. "Wednesday we be here at midnight, including this Ed. When I come back from driving Jerry to the casino, we three leave for the casino. By three fifteen a.m. I park panel truck in the canefield here." Gabe's heavy finger pointed to the casino layout. "At three fifty-five we cut the phone wires and go in when 'copter land in parking lot. If there any tourists in casino, tie 'em up but don't hurt 'em. We should be out by four twenty and the plane take off while we run for my truck. The sound of de car be lost in the noise of 'copter. I have you back here before five a.m. and you be in your cottages in half hour, while it still dark. Tom, you sure you can open the safe in twenty minutes?"

"Less if I have to blast."

"Good, mon." Gabe rubbed his heavy chin. "Remember, de one trouble with all plans is chance of some lousy little thing we *don't* plan on jumping up—like somebody running their mouth. Now, after the job: on Thursday morning Jerry and wife check out of hotel, the six-night package deal up. You call taxi to take you to the airport, you never been to casino dat night, you know nothing about it being robbed. On Thursday you, Tom, act the same you been doing every other day, but on Friday, you and wife check out, sorry your vacation over. This Ed will be on Jamaica plane, also on Thursday, for stop in his island hopping. Everything clear?"

Jerry said, "I don't like these young island kids working as dealers. What if they rush us?"

Gabe laughed. "I know the islanders. They be scared and they ain't armed. Also they want no part in helping the white mon. Well, I guess this is all for now. We be here tomorrow, same time. Tom, you go back to your hotel first."

As Tom stood up he said, "Something streaked by me in the fields and scared the pants off me. Any snakes about?"

Gabe chuckled. "Ole mongoose scare you. Bring 'em here many years ago to kill the snakes. No more snakes but the mongoose all over, he run the island."

When Tom left to make his slow return to the cottage, Jerry changed into his disguise for a visit to the casino. He asked, "Gabe, you got the—uh—going-away gift for your pilot?"

Gabe took a metal tube and a box of plastic putty from a drawer. "Yeah, mon. I stick this on the 'copter. You see knob on the top? One

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turn for one minute. I'll give it eight turns as we run from casino. By eight minutes he should be well out over the ocean. I take care of my end. And I watch you at the casino, mon—with that bum leg, the wig, Jerry you get an Oscar for acting."

"I'd rather get the cash," Jerry said, pleased at Gabe's compliment. "One thing worries me, Gabe. You certain there's money in that safe? Judging by the action I've seen, they're lucky to take in a hundred bucks a night."

"Mon, what you think, I'm some blasted young punk? The money there—a juicy mango waiting to be plucked, and full of sugar."

At midnight, Tuesday, the pilot rowed ashore from Rat Island. A dapper and swarthy little man, he held himself with arrogant stiffness and spoke bad English. He assured Jerry the helicopter would be ready to fly a few hours after dark, that he would carefully destroy any traces of it having been stored on Rat Island. "*Amigos,* have no worry, I very responsible man. Before Castro, I was full Colonel in Cuban Air Force."

Three things happened on Wednesday morning. After breakfast Tom Morris went to bed with a terrific pain in his chest. Maria sobbed, "I'll find a doctor, Tom."

"No docs."

"Tom, you can't go through with this! You'll never make it."

"A little rest and I'll be okay. Maybe I ate too much. Maria—if something—does happen—I mean *if,* your story is that I had indigestion recently but you didn't suspect it was my ticker. And I never said a word to you about seeing any heart doc. You get what I'm saying?"

Maria nodded, trying not to become hysterical. Tom squeezed her hand. "That's insurance against Jerry playing rough. But don't worry, we have the dough in the bank and by Friday we'll be back in the States. Hon, I'm a hunch player and I *know* I'll make it okay."

"Of course you will." She was silent for a moment, then said, "Tom, I've been thinking. Let's buy our house down here. Life is slower, easier. I'm sure I could make out as a dressmaker and your repair shop would probably be the only one in Antilla."

Tom laughed. "Hon, they ain't got a loose dime here. But I've been toying with the same idea. Perhaps we could swing it on one of the larger islands. We'll talk about that once we're back home. Maria, go out and soak up the sun—all tanned up, you're a South Seas dream."

At about the time Tom was talking to Maria, Ed Facit stepped from a jet, looking the typical tourist with his open sports shirt, camera and coat slung over his shoulder, and one suitcase. His tour called for Ed to spend the night at

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the Hotel Pineapple, which was up the beach from the Rum Barrel. Minutes after he checked in, Ed was walking the clean beach, a fine figure of a man in plaid swim trunks.

Jerry, who was stretched out on a beach mat, trying to decide if he should start his world tour with Paris or head for Japan, got to his feet and took a fast swim. Ed dived in and when the two of them were floating on their backs, riding the small waves, Jerry made certain Ed knew where Gabe's house was.

Returning to his mat, Jerry was startled when an elderly man, who had arrived at the hotel the night before with his plump wife from Guadeloupe, came over and said with a French accent, "Monsieur, allow me to introduce myself. Marcel Jacot, builder and contractor. Your charming wife told me you are in the paint business. As I am in the market for a thousand gallons of white paint, with a heavy lead base, perhaps we can do business."

He talked on and on, giving specifications and other technical matters, about which Jerry hadn't the smallest notion. Finally Jerry stalled the old man by telling him, "I only manage the store—my partner handles all the selling, the wholesale end. Give me your card and I'll have him write you in a couple of days."

Jerry found Carla in their cottage, changing into a bikini. He was too angry to be aware of how attractive she looked—her blonde hair bleached ashen by the tropical sun, her trim little body a golden tan with the small breasts and compact hips a creamy white contrast. Carla said, "I'm just getting ready to go to the beach."

Jerry slapped her face. "Dumb broad, what you shooting off your trap about the paint business for?"

Holding her cheek, Carla screamed, "You dirty bum! I—"

Putting a hand over her red mouth, he shook her. "Keep your damn voice down, stupid."

Eyes flashing with rage, she pushed him away. "I'm stupid? He came over to me last night, after supper, while you were holding up the bar. Him and his fat wife. They start chattering about if I'm from the States and what business you're in. What was I supposed to say—that I didn't know?"

"Okay, okay. I'm on edge, I guess. It's these little things that—aw, forget it." He sat on the bed.

Thrusting her face up into his, Carla said fiercely, "I warned you before about smacking me. If you ever—"

Jerry pulled her nude body down on his lap. Punching at him wildly, she snapped, "Keep your dirty hands off me! I won't take a beating from the likes of—"

"Carla, you know I never seen you look so—pretty."

Staring at him for a second, her eyes growing large, Carla gasped,

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"Oh, Jerry! You've been so—different, so friendly—down here."

A swift tropical rain had fallen Wednesday night. At 2:35 a.m. Thursday morning the sky was still pitch-black with rainclouds as Gabe drove his panel truck along Antilla's rutted back roads. He had already driven Jerry to the casino.

Ed and Tom were huddled on the front seat beside Big Gabe. Once, as they rounded a turn and saw an oncoming taxi, Ed muttered, "Hey, watch it!" as Gabe swung off the left side of the bumpy dirt road.

Gabe told him, "This used to be English island, so we drive on left side of the road. Didn't you see steering wheel on taxi what bring you to the hotel? Was on de right side of car."

"I guess it was an American heap, like this one," Ed said, rubbing the knuckles of his gloved hands, now and then touching the .38 stuck in his belt. He tried not to think of Janice who, in a few hours, would be on a Jamaica-bound jet. But Ed's mind was full of what a delightful place the islands were for a honeymoon. He was always nervous before a game or a job and when he was jittery he had to talk. "Sure is dark, but I guess that's a break for us. I like your island, Gabe—it's so quaint."

"For the tourist it is 'quaint,'" Gabe grunted, turning off his headlights as they neared the casino road. "For the islanders it is no-meat, no-potatoes poor."

"I suppose so," Ed said, wetting his lips.

Tom Morris thought only of his heart. He had a gun in his hip pocket, a bag holding the drill slung over one shoulder, and a tiny bottle of "soup" held gingerly in his gloved hand. While the soup wasn't as tricky as nitro, Tom wished the roads weren't so damn rough. But his greater fear was the irregular pounding of his heart; he was amazed the others didn't hear it.

Shortly after 3:00 a.m. Gabe swung the panel truck into the canefields, following a donkey path only he could see, and then stopped. Although the sugar cane was higher than the truck, through thin patches of cane they could see the bright lights of the casino about 150 yards away, looking unreal in the quiet night.

There was only one taxi waiting in the casino driveway. Gabe kept glancing at his watch and softly cursing; finally, at 3:20 a.m., four tourists came out and got into the cab—two men and two loud-mouthed women arguing over whether they'd dropped $18 in U.S. or Bee-Wee money.

When the taxi disappeared down the lonely road, Gabe grunted to put on their masks. Walking slowly through the stiff cane, they crossed to the dark side of the casino where Gabe pointed to tele-

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phone wires high up on the wall. Jumping, Ed was able to yank them off.

At 3:50 a.m., on hearing the approaching roar of the helicopter, Gabe whispered, "Remember, *amigos,* no English. Ed, as we enter, you take out the bartender. Let's go."

With the tiny helicopter making an unholy racket overhead, the three men dashed for the casino entrance, their guns out. Tom did fine, keeping up with the others without trouble.

Inside the casino, after the four tourists had departed, Jerry had left the blackjack table. Yawning, he limped over to the cashier's desk. A kid with a midwestern twang, who paid much attention to his oiled brown hair, exchanged Jerry's chips for money and asked, "You win tonight, mister?"

"Si. I win, little. Win-lose, is habit from my beloved Habana when she was—how you say?—all gambling joints."

Slowly pulling on kid gloves, Jerry started for the door, then seemed to change his mind and stopped at the bar for a beer. He sat at the table nearest the pantry. As the two house punks curtly ordered the native dealers to begin closing up, Jerry casually limped toward the rear of the screened pantry, as if in search of the Men's Room.

Inside the little room a thick-necked young man, lately from Jersey City, put his carbine down as he stretched. At the sound of the helicopter he stared dumbly at the ceiling, as if expecting something to come crashing through. Smacking a blackjack against the rear of Jersey City's skull, Jerry caught the goon before he fell. After frisking him, Jerry picked up the carbine as three masked men rushed through the casino entrance.

Stepping out of the pantry, yelling, *"Senors,* reach! *Pronto!"* Jerry covered the two floormen as Big Gabe and Tom quickly relieved them of their small automatics. Ed had stopped long enough to lean over the bar and kayo the astonished little Negro bartender with a wicked right to the jaw.

The pilot came running in, slightly drunk. Taking his place near the wide entrance, he fired a shot at the ceiling and shouted in Spanish, "Things go well."

Big Ed dragged the unconscious gunman from the pantry to where Tom had motioned for the other two goons to lie on the polished floor. The dealers, wearing red sashes around their thin waists and white starched shirts, their dark young faces full of fear, backed toward the row of slot machines. At Gabe's pistol gesture they raised their hands above their heads. As Ed bound and gagged the three punks with a roll of wide hospital tape, Jerry pointed his carbine at the office and told Tom, *"Amigo, pronto, pronto."*

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Tom actually laughed aloud behind his black mask—the safe was a newly painted but old Winbarten, a model he'd cracked more than once years ago. As Tom put his ear to the cold steel and moved the dials, he knew he could open it quickly, without blasting.

But the metal seemed to become a booming sounding board for the beat of his heart, and his ear became a loudspeaker. Pain and tension squeezed his hammering heart. Tom straightened up, pains shooting all over his left arm. For a long moment he merely stood there, sweat pouring down his face, waiting for the pressure to fade—as it always did—but it remained around his ticker.

Jerry, standing just outside the office, keeping an anxious eye on things, whispered, "What the hell you standing there for?"

Tom put his face against the safe again, but he couldn't hear the tumblers move—all he heard was the wild thumping of his heart. He knew, then, that he couldn't open the box by hand. He moaned, "I—I—got to blast."

"Damn!" Jerry stepped inside to help Tom set up the drill and plug it into a wall socket. The drill whirled for a split second and stopped. Jerry asked, "What's wrong with it?"

"Too much voltage—must have—their own generator," Tom said, the sweat running into his mouth as he panted out each word.

"What can we do? Listen, Gabe has a bomb. Can you blast it open with that?"

Tom shook his head, the movement filling his left arm with pain. "That would—jam it—never open. Let me try dials again."

Bracing his body against the safe so that he was rigid from the hips up, Tom put his ear to the metal and began twisting the dials; but he heard only the horrible thumping in his chest. He told himself, "I have to keep calm. I can't fake out now, not when Maria and me have it made. The pain—only a reaction from the running I did. It will go away like it always does—if I just relax." He leaned against the safe, his hands hanging at his side.

"Damn it, what's the matter with you? Come *on!*" Jerry whispered. "You said you—"

"Shut up!" Tom said fiercely, the pain mounting in his chest. "Get out!"

"Who the hell are you to—?"

Talking against the safe, Tom gasped, "You want me to open this can, get out!" The sound came out a hoarse rasping through the black cloth.

Puzzled, Jerry stepped outside the office. Gabe glanced impatiently at the office from across the casino floor. The drunken pilot, at the entrance, kept calling encouragement in soft Spanish, nobody understanding a word he said.

Tom rested against the safe, his eyes shut, his hands at his side—

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waiting for the deadly fog in his chest to lift.

The pilot suddenly whistled. Everybody but Tom heard the faint sound of an approaching car. It braked to a squealing stop outside. The pilot crouched beside the entrance.

Jerry moved quickly toward the bar. Gabe stood sideways so that he could watch both the entrance and the dealers. There was this impossible, almost absolute silence in the big casino for a long minute, broken at last by sounds of short, metallic taps.

A meaty-faced blonde in tight and flashy silver pants and red blouse came walking in on spike heels. She was almost scrawny except for the large face and the jutting bosom straining the blouse. Stopping suddenly and cautiously, inside the door, she asked the frightened dealers, "What's going on?"

Coming up behind her, the pilot slapped a hand across her mouth. As the Cuban wrestled with the kicking girl, Jerry came forward, holding the carbine like a club. Ed sprinted across the casino.

The pilot had the blonde's elbows pinned to her sides, but her hands were free. From a pocket she managed to pull out a small knife and slashed the forearm across her chest. The pilot let go of her with a curse and the girl broke toward the door, screaming hysterically.

As Jerry started to club her, Ed pushed him aside, spun the blonde around, and silenced the scream with tape quickly slapped over the open mouth. The pilot threw a punch at the girl, but Ed stopped the blow with his own shoulder and poked the pilot in the gut with his elbow.

As the Cuban bent over, sucking air, Jerry grabbed and shook him, then pushed the pilot out the entrance ahead of him.

Rapidly binding the girl's hands, Ed carried her under his free arm like a toy doll and then gently lowered her to the floor next to the three punks. He expertly caught her kicking legs, taped them, then gave her rear a not-too-gentle slap as he straightened up.

Seconds later Jerry and the pilot returned. Taking his place at the entrance, the pilot said in Spanish and English, "It's okay, she came alone." Then he examined his cut arm.

Stepping over to Jerry, Gabe whispered, "Gal probably belong one of the punks. No trouble. We here fifteen-twenty minutes now. What keep de box mon?"

Jerry said into Gabe's masked ear, "He's standing there against the damn safe, doing *nothing!* Nothing, like a damn statue! He's gone nuts or—"

"Or what?" Gabe cut in coldly. "He your mon."

At that moment Tom called from the office, *"Amigos!"* There

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was a note of triumph in his shrill voice.

When Jerry had left, a wonderful silence had surrounded Tom and seemed to ease the pressure in his chest. Without knowing about the car or the girl, Tom had relaxed in the peaceful quiet, his tension steadily fading. When it had vanished, he had casually rested a few moments longer, then calmly concentrated on the dials. He was lucky to stumble on the combination within minutes.

Remembering his limp now, Jerry made a lopsided run to the office, followed by Gabe, yanking two nylon sacks from under his windbreaker. Gabe grunted at Tom, "Pack de drill, then go help Ed."

Gazing at the neat piles of U.S. and Canadian money, Jerry sobbed, "Jeez, we pulled it off!" A few minutes later he and Gabe emerged from the office, each carrying a sack filled mostly with $10, $20, and $50 bills. Tom and Ed joined them backing toward the entrance. The pilot shouted in broken English, "No move for twenty minute or me bomb—from plane! You hear? Boom! Atomic boom-boom! Blow all to hell. No move!"

The pilot and Jerry started out first, followed by Gabe and Tom, then Ed.

The groggy bartender, now struggling to his feet, his mouth a bloody smear against his brown face, hurled a bar knife at them. It went deep into Gabe's wide back as Ed shot part of the bartender's head off.

Gabe fell, still clutching his money sack. Turning, Jerry fired a burst from the carbine over the heads of the terrified dealers, as Ed picked up Gabe and Jerry grabbed Gabe's sack.

Once outside, the pilot shot out the two front tires of the girl's car, then raced for the helicopter which was sitting in the empty parking lot like a weird bird. Over the noise of the engine Jerry yelled at Ed, "Where the hell's the truck?"

With Big Gabe across his shoulders, Ed was already heading for the sugar cane. The three of them crashed through the tough cane until they reached the truck. After stretching Gabe on the back seat, Ed slid behind the wheel.

Tom was leaning against a fender, blowing hard. He ripped the mask off to gulp more air, his entire body shaking with the frantic beat of his heart. Jerry tossed the two money sacks in, sat beside Gabe, pulling off his blue glasses and wig as he gently pried the knife out of Gabe's back. Ed snarled at Tom, "What you standing out there for?"

Tom tumbled onto the front seat as Ed started the motor under the covering roar of the helicopter, backed the truck out into the road, his face pressed against the windshield trying to see in the darkness.

The 'copter noise faded in the

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opposite direction. Hurtling down the bumpy road at 60 an hour, Ed took a bend in the dark road so sharply that he had to fight the wheel to keep the panel truck from turning over. Slowing to a crawl, he called back, "How is Gabe?"

"Dead," Jerry mumbled, two thoughts racing about in his tight mind. The metal bomb was still in Gabe's pocket, so the Cuban would have to be paid off—maybe. And the main thought: now the money was *all* his—nearly a million bucks!

The sound of Tom's hoarse breathing filled the truck for a moment. He was almost bawling with relief as he thought, "I made it! I made it!"

Ed stared out at the darkness in a sick haze, still seeing the bartender's head blow apart.

Jerry asked, "Ed, can you get us back to Gabe's house?"

"Yeah." Ed snapped out of his nightmare, gave the car gas. "I'm sure we make a right at the first intersection, follow that until we hit this village, where we make another right, bringing us to the coast. The island's so small, once we follow the coastline we *have* to come to the hotels and back to Gabe's place."

"Step on it!" Jerry said. "Keep your lights out. We should have another hour of darkness."

The panel truck raced through the night. Minutes later it sped by the village, the miserable huts standing as silent ghosts of poverty. Ed took the dirt road to his right on two screaming wheels, sure he was already smelling the salty ocean air.

A quarter mile ahead an old, heavy, open truck, used for hauling sugar cane to the mill, was slowly coming toward them, its ancient kerosene lights two dim spots in the night.

The rough road was fairly wide and the truck driver veered to his left on suddenly seeing the dark panel truck racing at him. With reflex action, Ed jerked the panel truck to his right.

The two trucks hit with a tremendous crash which awoke the entire village . . .

As the village was without a phone, it took time for the Antilla police to hear of the accident. In fact, it was nearly noon before a police Jeep reached the scene of the crash. The truck driver, although badly shaken and with one arm fractured, was able to tell the police, "De mon in de little truck, that one drive like crazy mon! No lights and on de *wrong* side of de road! Sirs, see where me truck is, on de left, where it belong. Sirs, this be not my fault at all."

The police agreed. As the casino had not reported either the robbery or the shooting, the police pulled the four crushed bodies from the wrecked panel truck—bodies already stinking from the hot tropical sun—and decided they must

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have been Yankee tourists, so no wonder they were driving on the *right* instead of the *left* side of the road. The police listed it as the worst auto accident in Antilla's history.

Of course not a single bill was found in or around the panel truck. Nor, strangely enough, did the driver bother to ask who would pay for the damage to his ancient truck. He and the villagers thought that it was indeed a terrible accident. But as they had scooped up the loose money—some bills represented more cash than any of them had ever seen in a lifetime—they were also certain this was the biggest financial windfall ever to strike the (once) poor people of Antilla.

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Walsh, Thomas	THE RESURRECTION MAN	Simon & Schuster	3.50	1/14
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Coppel, Alec	MOMENT TO MOMENT	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	12/30
Hamilton, Donald	THE STEEL MIRROR	Gold Medal (Orig.)	.50	12/30
Raine, William MacLeod	BORDER BREED	Popular Library	.50	1/20

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the *NEWEST* story by

ANTHONY GILBERT

Forrest Reid once called a tale by Walter de la Mare the most appalling murder story ever written, even though the word "murder" was never used in the story. The essence of this perceptive observation applies to Anthony Gilbert's "Sleep Is the Enemy"—although the operative word in Anthony Gilbert's story is not "murder." It is perhaps an even more terrifying word . . .

This is not one of Anthony Gilbert's typical stories—certainly not a lighthearted tale, like so many of the author's stories about Arthur Crook. No, definitely not lighthearted; rather, lightheaded—and brilliantly morbid . . . a hypnotic and oddly labyrinthine story that will dig deep into your nervous system . . .

SLEEP IS THE ENEMY

by ANTHONY GILBERT

I WON'T BELIEVE IT, IT'S GOT TO BE a dream—of course it's a dream—because if it's true, what happens next?

I've always been susceptible to dreams, though I don't say much about them. People like my mother and Honor—that's my married sister—say it's morbid to talk about them; they even hint there's something odd about people who dream the way I do. And I've never even mentioned them to Ronnie; not because he wouldn't understand—naturally he would; but it's not necessary—there are no secrets between us.

I've known Ronnie for as long as I've really known anyone. You don't begin knowing people till you're about 18; up till then you live in a sort of daylight dream, like that poem by Tennyson (I think) where all the men are noble and all the women fair.

I'm fair myself, and what's called petite. I told Honor once that I'd seen a picture of Andromeda rising from the waves, and she'd have been like me if she hadn't been so tall. Honor said, "Nonsense! Andromeda was chained to a rock and was rescued by Perseus." If I was chained to a rock, Ronnie would rescue me, I told her.

I used to go about a lot with

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Ronnie before I went to Spain to stay with my mother's sister, Rosa, who had a kind of a villa there—not my idea of comfort, no piped water and no electricity, and your nearest neighbor two miles away. No wonder she was lonely, and Mother thought I should go and be with her for a time, and I knew I owed life something because of Ronnie, so I went. Only I didn't stay as long as they expected. Aunt Rosa's plans were changed suddenly, I don't quite understand why, and I had to come home.

One of the strangest things about this dream is when it started. My dreams are like that—reality merges into dream and sometimes I can't pinpoint the absolute instant that happens. I know it wasn't a dream—my going to Spain, I mean—and it wasn't a dream that Honor met me when I came back.

While I was away they'd had my room redone. I wasn't very pleased about that—I liked it the way it was, with its striped Regency paper and the white china cat I bought from a stall in Dorchester, and the musical box, shaped like a canary in a cage, that whistled when you pressed a spring.

It was annoying, too, to find that the cat had somehow got broken. "Who did it?" I asked, and Mother said, "Never mind; we'll find you another sometime."

"It won't be my cat," I told her. She might as well have said we'll find you another Ronnie.

I've known as long as I've known anything that Ronnie and I would get married one day. I did think we might announce it before I went to Spain, but I suppose it would have looked odd my going abroad the next minute.

I shall call myself Sarah when I'm a married woman. I don't like Sally—Sally in our alley, you know. We don't live in an alley, of course; we live in a very nice house—that is, my mother and I do. Honor lives with her husband Charles, except when he's away on some mission or other. I don't remember my father; he died or went away or something.

So I think my dream must have started when I saw Ronnie crossing Market Street—that's the main street of our village—with a girl I'd never met. In dreams you don't generally recognize anyone, but of course I recognized him. Ronnie could never be a stranger to me.

This girl was bigger than I am, taller, and it was easy to see she wasn't used to village life. We all go around in cardigans over summer frocks, and twin sets over our tweed skirts in winter. Perhaps she thought she'd impress us with her smart suit, and she even wore a hat. And her pearls were real.

Not that mine aren't real, of course, but they're real cultured, and hers were real oyster. I don't know how I knew, but I did. And she wore a brooch in her lapel, like a peacock spreading its tail, and

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the tail was winking with little bright jewels—emeralds and sapphires. And the peacock's crest was diamonds. She was walking in sunlight, and it was like seeing a fire blazing on her breast.

I expected Ronnie to drop her arm and rush over to me—we hadn't met since I got back from Spain—but he didn't see me. She made sure of that, nudging him and dragging him over the road. She was talking so hard he must have been deafened.

Of course, I realized she knew who I was and wanted to hustle him out of my sight. That seemed to me awfully funny and I began to laugh. I did think for a minute of following them, but then I thought, I don't have to go chasing after him, let him come after me.

When I got home I said cheerfully at luncheon, "Who do you think I saw when I was out this morning? Ronnie. And what's more, he didn't see me. I suppose he doesn't know I'm home yet." I did explain, didn't I, that I came back from Spain earlier than anyone expected?

"Did you speak to him?" asked my mother. She is short like me, but bent over, rather dumpy really. She must have had a lot of anxiety about my father. Poor mother, I thought. I'll never know that kind of grief, not when I'm married to Ronnie.

I began to chuckle, a thing I don't often do, but everything is different in dreams. "No, I didn't speak to him—I thought I wouldn't spoil his fun. He was out with a girl—no one I know."

"That's Thelma Bennett," my sister said. "Her father has bought The Grange. She and Ronnie have been seeing a lot of each other while you've been away. She's quite a well-known pianist."

"I've never heard of her," I said. And then I saw my mother making signs to Honor. I knew exactly what she meant. Don't make Sally jealous. As if I could be jealous of a girl he'd known only a few weeks! And besides, it was natural that he'd want someone to go about with while I was in Spain.

"A substitute," I said, voicing my thought. "I wonder if she knows we're engaged."

"How should she?" asked Honor bluntly. "You're not engaged."

"People who understand each other as well as Ronnie and I do don't have to put things into words. All the same, I don't see any sense in postponing the announcement now. And it would be fairer to—what did you say her name was?"

"Thelma Bennett. Her father's a wealthy manufacturer."

"Trade," I commented, but I said it quite pleasantly. It wasn't the girl's fault that her father had a trade rather than a profession.

My mother asked, "Did Ronnie write to you while you were in Spain?"

I shrugged. "You know how it

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is—no one writes letters nowadays. Presently they'll stop teaching how to write in school, and do everything by telephone or computer. Now that Ronnie knows I'm back he'll be round in a flash. It wouldn't surprise me," I said, "if he came round this afternoon."

"I thought you said he didn't see you," said Honor unpleasantly.

"He'll know," I told her.

I didn't go out again that afternoon—well, I was tired, and I didn't want to be away when he rang; only something must have come up to prevent him. Still, when you're as sure of anyone as I am of Ronnie what does one afternoon matter?

All the same, I decided to go out the next morning. Love is meek, but it shouldn't be too meek; so I said airily to Honor that she could take any messages that came for me.

"Where are you going?" she hectored me.

"Out," I said gaily.

I went round the shops and bought one or two things that would be useful when I have my own house. "What on earth are those for?" Honor asked.

"They're kitchen goods," I told her gently. "Can't you see?"

"Of course I can see. But what for?"

"For when I have my own kitchen." I could hear myself being very patient with her.

"More sense to wait till you've got one," she snapped.

"Of course we shall have one," I told her. "I'm not going to live in a hotel when I'm married. Ronnie will want his own home. And that reminds me," I went on, enormously casual, "any messages?"

When Honor shook her head I began to be angry. Then I thought she might be making it up, so I asked Mother, but she said the same. All right, I decided, if he can't bother to ring me up—what I mean is, I thought perhaps it would be a good idea to give him a bit of a jolt. There's such a thing as taking someone too much for granted.

So after tea I got out my writing pad and started to write him a letter. I said that I'd had time to review our situation while I was away—get things in proportion, I said—and I'd come to the conclusion that perhaps I'd been hasty. After all, I'd never seen anything of the world or met anyone but him; now my perspective was enlarged, and I thought it might be a good idea to look round a bit before I was finally committed. So I'd decided not to let him announce our engagement immediately, and in the meantime we were both free.

It was a good letter—I was quite carried away by it myself. When I came to read it through, I was surprised to find how long it was, but I couldn't cut it. For one thing, writing makes me tired, and the last paragraphs had begun to sprawl a bit; and anyway there was nothing I could bear to cut out. As I came

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back from the post I met my mother in the hall.

"Where have you been, dear?" she said.

"Am I a lunatic or something that I can't even go to the post by myself?" I demanded.

She gave me the strangest look. "Have you been writing to Ronnie?"

I clapped my hands. "Go to the top of the class," I told her. "It's all right, Mother, I know what I'm doing. A sprat to catch a mackerel, you might say." Though I don't quite know why I added that, it seemed to round off the conversation.

That night I was in a velvet mood—as they say, a tiger-cat could have played with me. Dare to be a Daniel, I sang in my bath. Daniel among the lions. Lions with faces like Honor who would put me in a cage, if she could—the way she watched me. I wonder if she and Charles are breaking up, I said to Mother. Men don't like being watched.

"Nonsense," said Mother, "they're devoted. Don't start any silly stories like that, Sally."

Next morning I thought of Ronnie opening my letter. He'd get a shock all right—I wouldn't really have been surprised if he'd appeared at the breakfast table. That's the worst of letting people get too sure of you. That girl he was with, Thelma Something, she'd never let anyone be too sure.

When he didn't come I thought he'd ring, but he didn't. I suppose he felt it was too important to talk about on the telephone. All the same, I decided to stay in—wouldn't go to the Odeon with Honor to see some Disney film that was going the rounds.

Honor stared. "But you know you never miss a Disney. This one's about animals."

"So?" I said, cool as a snowflake. But I was boiling inside.

The day went on, and the phone never rang. It didn't occur to me that Ronnie would simply abide by my decision—love isn't that spiritless. Look what I'd done for love. That puzzled me. What had I done? Yet I was sure there'd been something . . .

A letter came the next morning. He said he was glad to hear from me and know I was so much better. (Better? I hadn't been ill; I'd gone to Spain to keep Aunt Rosa company. I began to wonder what stories Honor had been spreading about me.) He was sure I was doing the wise thing deciding to come to no definite decision as yet. He wanted me to know that he bore me no ill-feeling. (Why should he?) The past was over. And one day, when I was really fit—(there it was again, the suggestion that I wasn't somehow quite myself)—he hoped I should find a happy future. And he added that he supposed Honor had told me about his engagement to Miss Bennett, though it hadn't

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been made public yet. Presently we must all meet . . .

A lot of time went by, the way it does in dreams. Then I heard Honor's voice, and she sounded quite fierce. "Pull yourself together, Sally," she was saying. "Don't let's start all that over again. Once was bad enough."

"I've heard from Ronnie," I said. "If it's a joke—"

"It's not a joke," my sister told me.

"You haven't read my letter?"

"How could I, when you've got it all scrunched up in your hand. I suppose he told you about Thelma Bennett."

"He thought I meant it," I said. "She's got him on the rebound."

"No, she hasn't," Honor contradicted. "They've been unofficially engaged for weeks. Everyone knows—except you. We *tried* to tell you."

"I wouldn't have expected him to be so fickle. Another case of out of sight, out of mind. Just because I was good-natured and went to stay with Aunt Rosa because she was lonely."

I couldn't go on. My tongue seemed so thick and large that it wouldn't go inside my mouth, and my words came out all confused. "Everyone knew he was going to marry me."

"No one knew it, except you. And you knew the truth—really you did. Or are you saying you've forgotten everything?"

"I couldn't forget anything about Ronnie. What was there for me to forget?" I added.

"The real reason you went to Spain. Well, you had to go away quickly, and Mother begged Aunt Rosa—"

"You mean, she wanted to be rid of me? Oh, charming!" I began to shout, "Mother, Mother!"

Mother came moving like those little birds—partridges, I think they are—that are so swift and still you feel they must be equipped with invisible wings.

"Sally, what is it? Honor, you haven't—?"

"She's heard from Ronnie," said my sister in a flat voice.

"What did he say?"

"He told her the truth."

"Oh, no! How could he be so cruel?"

"She had to know some time. After what happened—"

"What *did* happen?" I screamed. "Why was I sent away?"

"You had a sort of breakdown," said Mother.

"Because of Ronnie?"

"Well—yes. Darling, you have to accept the fact that in life things don't always work out the way we'd like them to. We all know how you feel about Ronnie—"

"Words!" I said with a sweeping gesture. Something crashed, I don't know what—Nature coming in on my side, perhaps. "I wrote to tell him he was free."

"That was very generous, Sally.

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I'm proud of you. Not everyone would have the courage."

"Oh, what's the use?" cried Honor. "This isn't getting us anywhere. No, Mother, it's gone on long enough—this foolish pretense. If Ronnie doesn't marry Thelma Bennett he still won't marry you. You knew that, didn't you?"

"Is that why I had a breakdown?"

"I told you she shouldn't have come back," Honor said.

"But Rosa—" Mother began. They spoke as if I wasn't there.

"I shall go to see Ronnie," I announced. "I shall explain—"

"He won't see you," Honor said. "He's got one scar he'll carry for life."

I didn't know what she was talking about. Ronnie has no scars—he's the handsomest man I ever met.

"We might go away for a little, just you and I," my mother suggested quickly.

"But I've only just got back." I stared at them. "Oh, I see what it is—Honor doesn't like me around. Well, if she can't stand being in the same house with her own sister, then let *her* go away. She's got a husband, hasn't she? Not that I want to drive you out," I added politely, "but this is *my* home, and you shouldn't forget that you're only a guest here now."

Up in my room I started to wonder if I'd been selfish. Mother obviously needed a holiday. I'd noticed how worn she looked. I ought to have understood that when she suggested we go away it was really for her sake. I didn't blame her—Honor would wear out a dripping stone. That doesn't sound right, it's water that wears out the stone.

Everything was very quiet. It was suddenly like being in a vacuum. Presently Honor came up with a tray. "I've brought you some lunch," she said. "Don't bother to come down. Mother's got a headache."

"She needs to get away," I said. "I'm sorry I didn't realize it. I'll tell her when I come down."

"You mean, you will go away with her?"

"Well!" I laughed, I could feel my eyes crinkling up in a sly fashion. "I don't think she'd want to go with you. You should have taken better care of her while I was in Spain. I couldn't be in two places at once, and I was looking after Aunt Rosa."

"I'll tell her," promised Honor, in a restrained sort of voice.

"Oh, I'll tell her," I said indulgently. "You mustn't let your lunch get cold."

I spoke quite carelessly, feeling absolutely in charge of the situation. Poor Mother, cooped up with Honor all these weeks. It wasn't really surprising that she didn't want me to marry Ronnie. Since father died or went away or whatever, she'd had to look after everything. Honor wasn't much help, and then she got married so soon.

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And when I went away, Mother would be quite alone. It must be terrible to be a person no one really needs. It was the first time I'd understood how terribly she needed me.

"I will never desert Mr. Micawber," I said quietly, and then shrieked with laughter at the sight of Honor's face.

I hadn't noticed that I'd eaten my lunch till Honor picked up the empty tray. I said I thought I'd try to get some sleep; she said they were all going to try to get some sleep, and I said, "What a good idea!"

I waited quite a long time after she'd gone before I even opened my door. The house was very quiet, mouse-quiet. I came onto the landing, remembering not to put on my shoes. No one stirred. I came down, remembering the stair that creaked and avoiding it, and went out by the garden way.

There was a lovely sun, and it caught the roses in their circular beds. I had a fresh idea and I rushed about picking them willy-nilly. I picked till my arms were full. The Greuze girl only had a dove, I thought, but I have a garden in my arms. If you're going to cause grief—and how could I help myself?—you should pave the way gently, and how better than with roses?

I went out by the back gate, looking over my shoulder at the windows, half expecting to see a curtain move, or a hand or face. But everything was still with that divine sunny stillness that makes you hope eternity will be like that.

I didn't go through Market Street. I went by side-lanes, and quite soon I was at The Grange. There was a swan on the lake there, very pure and still, bosom to bosom on the bright water. I might have been a ghost—no one paid any attention to me.

I reached the porch, still carrying the roses, though a few had dropped on the way. Yet someone must have seen me, because the door opened before I'd even rung the bell.

"I've brought these for Miss Bennett," I said, not looking up. "Miss Thelma Bennett."

"I'm Thelma Bennett," a voice said, and I looked up and it was true. She was the girl I'd seen with Ronnie.

"These are for you," I told her, pushing the roses into her arms. A few of the thorns had caught in my hair and I had difficulty getting free. The time of roses—Swinburne had something to say about that.

"Ronnie wrote and said he wanted me to meet you," I said. We went into a room opening off the hall; it was full of very fine furniture but I couldn't see Ronnie there. "He gave me a message," I continued.

"Are you Sarah Trent?"

"How did you guess?" I mocked. I felt so light, so utterly capable; I

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thought at any instant I might levitate. "He's told you about us, of course. We're getting married, you know."

"No," she said carefully. "He didn't tell me that."

"Well, in a way he doesn't know himself. You see, I wrote and broke it off."

"And now you've changed your mind?"

She looked like the Ice Maiden, so still and pale, so beautiful in a statuesque sort of way; but no man wants to live with a statue. You can worship that sort of beauty, but how can you love it? And love was what Ronnie needed.

I began to explain it all to her. I got very eloquent, and I could see she was moved.

"You said you had a message from Ronnie," she reminded me.

"Yes. He wants you to know it was all a mistake. He wants you to set him free."

"He's not a prisoner," she told me. "He belongs to himself."

"That's where you're wrong," I assured her. "He belongs to me. And I shall fight for him to the death, if need be."

"You don't know what you're saying," she began, and suddenly I was terribly angry. "Honor as much as told you to say that, didn't she? You know why, don't you? It's because of my mother. Honor feels she ought to offer her a home, but she's selfish; so long as I'm there she can shunt all her responsibility onto me. Only—I don't concur."

I liked the sound of that, so I said it again. "I don't concur. I want to live, too. I'm going to live with Ronnie."

She came a bit closer. "Do put that thing down," she said in quite a normal sort of voice. And to my surprise I saw that I'd picked up a silver paper knife from a table. It had quite a sharp blade.

"Thank you for warning me," I told her gravely. "This is too sharp for cutting paper. It's dangerous. It shouldn't be lying about."

"I'll see that it's put away," she promised, holding out her hand. It was a beautiful hand, long-fingered, very supple; it seemed to have life in each separate finger. But the hand was for playing the piano, not for grabbing Ronnie or trying to control me.

"What's that for?" I inquired. I gave her hand a light slap with the knife.

She tried to snatch the knife away from me—well, that shows you she was mad, doesn't it? She'd just said how sharp the edge was. Suddenly there was blood—and I can't bear the sight of blood.

"What are you doing?" I shouted. I pulled the knife away. Then she came nearer, with the blood dripping, and I told her to keep off.

"Keep away from me!" I yelled. She had got me with my back to the wall. I had to defend myself, hadn't I? The man I saw afterward

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in the hospital, the man who didn't behave like a doctor—he agreed with me. Of course I had to defend myself. He said so—I'm sure he did . . .

One strange thing about dreams is that there's nearly always an instant when you realize it's a dream, and if you make the effort you can escape; but there's only that split second, and the effort is so great that if you hesitate, you've passed the point of no return and must go through to the end. But by that time something has happened to you that can never be altogether undone. It's like a scar—someone else spoke of a scar, I can't quite recall who.

Well, in this dream I never so much as recognized that fateful moment when withdrawal was still a possibility, and I knew now I was too deep in for escape.

When I opened my eyes Thelma Bennett had vanished and I was in a room I'd never seen before. That wasn't strange—the strange thing in dreams is when you find yourself in a familiar place.

This room was painted white, with a pale-green fireplace; there was a big white cupboard with a very shiny metal key, and there were bars on the window. I wondered why there were bars, and then I realized that it was to keep the birds out. I could see trees through the glass and where there are trees there are always birds.

You know, people have a lot of misapprehensions about birds. They talk about feathered songsters and the bird on Calvary plucking the thorn out of Our Lord's brow, and those other birds—robins, I think—that covered the babes in the wood with leaves; but they're not like that really. They have beaks that stab and stab. There was a picture I saw at the Odeon sometime ago about birds—Honor was furious when she found out. "Now you'll have nightmares for weeks to come," she said, but I hardly heard her because of the noise the birds made, like a fleet of jet planes. It went on in my head long after I'd left the cinema.

Then I noticed they'd left a bit of the window open at the top, so I struggled out of bed, because even small birds can be violent. I was trying to shut the window when the door opened and someone came in—a housemaid, I supposed, because she wore a striped dress and a cap. I didn't know anybody wore them any more. She ran across the room and snatched at my hand.

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Shutting the window, of course."

"You can't do that—you must have some air."

"Then you can leave the door open."

But she said that would be against the rules.

"What rules? Where am I?"

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"In a hospital, of course."

"I'm not ill." Then I began to remember. "What did she do to me?" It was odd—I'd never dreamed myself in a hospital before. "Is she here—Thelma Bennett, I mean?"

She gave me the strangest look. "No," she said, "she's not here."

"She should be behind bars," I said, nodding furiously. "Did you know that she attacked me with a knife?"

"Why should you think she'd do that?"

Without my noticing it she had coaxed me back into bed.

"Because of Ronnie, of course. I had to tell her it was no use—she couldn't marry him, because he was going to marry me. It's lucky for Ronnie that he found out what she was like." Only that doesn't make sense, does it, because he wasn't going to marry her, anyhow. "Is he here?" I added. I could picture him, storming up and down the corridors.

"You haven't been well enough to have visitors."

"I'm well enough now."

"We'll have to see what the doctor says."

She went out, locking the door behind her. I realized then that she hadn't been telling me the truth. Thelma was somewhere around, and they had to lock the door to protect me from her. I couldn't be expected to defend myself all the time.

I told that to the doctor when he came to see me. He didn't seem like a doctor—didn't ask any of the usual questions, didn't take my pulse or my temperature, just asked me what I remembered about what had happened.

"What is there to remember?" I inquired pettishly. "I told her she couldn't marry Ronnie and she came at me with a pair of scissors."

"Scissors?"

"Well, no, now I come to think of it, it was a paper knife. I warned her it was too sharp to be left lying about."

"And then?"

Suddenly I was fearfully tired. "What does it matter?" I asked, beginning to yawn. "It's only a dream, and it's nearly over. There never was any such person as Thelma Bennett."

That wonderful sense of lightheadedness came back as I spoke. That's the miraculous part about dreams—once you're free of them you know that nothing that tormented you has ever happened. I hadn't ever seen Ronnie walking on Market Street with a woman I didn't know. I'd never gone to The Grange, carrying an armful of roses—I was a bit sorry about that, because it made such a good picture. But everything that had tortured me and driven me down into the pit—it didn't matter any more because nothing had ever happened.

I laughed with pure delight.

There was a period of darkness

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then, like a passage leading from unreality to the truth. When I came out of the dark I was still in bed, but now I didn't mind, because it was my own bed. I had only to open my eyes and I'd see the new wallpaper with the cloudy roses, and the singing bird—I did wish I knew what had happened to the cat—and my own trees beyond my own window. I rolled over luxuriously and opened my eyes.

It was all there—the white walls and the pale-green mantelpiece, the cupboard with the shiny metal key and the bars at the windows.

"Wake up," I told myself furiously. "Wake up, wake up!"

Because it's possible, isn't it, to get so deep into a dream that you can never escape. Perhaps someone comes and takes your unconscious body and won't let it go—like that girl who went to sleep on a chaise longue and something frightful happened to her. It's funny, but I couldn't quite remember what.

I must have called out, because the door opened and the nurse came in. I realized now she was a nurse, not a housemaid.

"We can't have all that noise," she said authoritatively. "You're disturbing the other patients. If you're having a nightmare—"

"That's it," I said, and I began to sob. "Make me wake up. Why don't you make me wake up?" I caught at her wrist, but I never meant to scratch her.

She pulled her arm away. "You are awake," she said. "Look round you. It's the same room, isn't it?"

"It's not my room." I was screaming between the sobs. "Make it change. You heard what I said—make it change!"

"I can't do that," she told me, pulling down her sleeve over the scratch. I supposed she'd say that I'd attacked her like a maniac. "I'm not a magician. Anyway, what's wrong with this room? If you're afraid of the birds, look, there's a piece of zinc over the top of the window; it was put there to stop the flies from getting in. You're perfectly safe here. Safer than you'd be anywhere else," she added in a voice that seemed to suggest she wasn't talking to me.

She went away and locked the door again. She said she'd bring me something to make me sleep. But I don't want to sleep. Sleep is the enemy. If I hadn't been asleep I couldn't have strayed into this dream. And a dream is what it has to be—there was a door in, there must be a door out.

Because, if there isn't a door out, what happens next?

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 292nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . "The Teaberry Mystery" is another example of the truth of Charles Caleb Colton's famous observation that "imitation is the sincerest flattery"; and what an apropos parody-pastiche surname the author hit upon for her detective—for what does a parrot do but imitate?

The author, Karla Wingert Hoke, was 25 when she wrote "The Teaberry Mystery." She has been writing since she was 9 years old. Her occupation now? In her own words, "Lazy Housewife"—she'd much prefer (still quoting from her letter) "to plunk myself down at my typewriter than wash, iron, or dust." When not at her typewriter, Mrs. Hoke "copes with home and husband and three children."

Aside from writing, Mrs. Hoke is "positively fruity about Tennessee Walking Horses and German Shepherd Dogs," and she warned us that if EQMM accepts her "first story," she "won't be fit to live with." What can we do but offer Mr. Hoke and the three little Hokes our sincere apologies?

THE TEABERRY MYSTERY

by KARLA WINGERT HOKE

HERKIMER PARROT SIPPED THE thick, brown liquid from the square mug. He had recently replaced all his round cups—one of them had an infinitesimal chip on the rim—for the symmetrical perfection of sturdy square mugs with their sturdy square handles.

I watched him, perplexed. The letter which had come in the morning post was most mysterious. Yet Parrot had not moved from his comfortable chair or done anything except to raise his eyebrows slightly. He sat there placidly sipping one of those dreadfully sweet concoctions of which he is so fond.

I rose and went to the table, which of course was square as was all the furniture in the room. I picked up the letter and taxed him with it. "Parrot, you must do something about this situation. It is urgent."

"Ah, *mon ami!* Urgent?"

"Of course!" I said anxiously.

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"The writer is evidently in great distress—we must do something!"

"And what is it we must do, my good Hasseling?"

"We must go there at once—there is no time to be lost!"

"A la bonne heure, mon ami. There is no train to Little Puddle-under-the-Roof until one o'clock. I have already ascertained." Parrot inclined his head in a show of modesty.

I gazed at him in admiration. While I had been frantically trying to interest him in the problem, he had unobtrusively checked the timetables which, I now saw, were lying neatly beside the square jug containing his *sirop*.

"Ah, Parrot!" I said eagerly. "What do you think can be the trouble at Little Puddle-under-the-Roof?" I read the letter aloud. "'My dear M. Parrot: Please come at once to Little Puddle-under-the-Roof. There is trouble brewing and I am afraid something will happen which cannot be undone. I urge you to come with all possible haste. Wire arrival time. Transportation will await you at the station. I shall explain fully when I see you. Faithfully, your good friend, Tattertweet.'"

Tattertweet, I must explain, has helped Parrot on those occasions when I have been abroad and consequently unable to lend my assistance. He is a fluttery little man, given to cultivation of the great and near-great. He is a veritable walking Who's Who.

Tattertweet does not actually participate in Parrot's detection. According to Parrot, his great help has been a timely remark which tends to place a situation into perspective. And of course he has great tact when dealing with the upper class.

As I finished reading the letter, Parrot placed his fingertips together precisely and nodded his pear-shaped head, one of the few things in the room which was not perfectly square.

"Yes, yes, my friend. We shall go down to Little Puddle-under-the-Roof. Once there I shall put my faculties to work on the problem."

"But, Parrot—"

He turned to me with a twinkle in his eyes. "Hasseling, you would have me deduce what trouble our friend Tattertweet has encountered merely by perusing his letter?"

I admitted I had that thought in mind.

His eyes twinkled more merrily than before and he stroked his huge mustache, of which he is inordinately proud. "You think that by perhaps sniffing the letter, peering closely at the small blemishes and smudges, the solution will spring to mind? No, *mon ami,* I am not the Schlock Homes to deduce such things on such flimsy evidence. One must see, one must observe, and then by method and order one

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reaches the solution. And now my friend, you shall ready our things. Enough for one day will be sufficient. Herkimer Parrot requires no longer to solve the case."

I hurried to do his bidding, thinking that Parrot was becoming more conceited than ever. He had no idea of the facts of the case, yet he was supremely confident he would have the solution in one day.

A wire was sent to Little Puddle-under-the-Roof informing them of our arrival time. Parrot entrusted this task to me. I usually take care of the smaller matters. I suspect that he underrates my capability to take care of larger matters.

Shortly we were on our way to Little Puddle-under-the-Roof. Parrot was thoughtful—most likely resting his little gray cells, which he regards so highly.

We were met at the station by a uniformed chauffeur, then driven rapidly to a large country estate enclosed by high walls and covered with ivy. I recognized the place, of course—it has been in the news frequently. It is the country home of a very social Duchess—the Duchess of Teaberry.

Upon arriving we were shown into an imposing waiting room, where we could make ourselves comfortable until Mr. Tattertweet was informed of our arrival. The butler murmured that tea would be sent in; we composed ourselves to wait.

Several minutes later Mr. Tattertweet burst into the room. It was quite unlike him. He is, as I have stated, a fluttery person, but not an energetic one. His entry into the waiting room was most precipitate—quite unlike his usual manner.

"M. Parrot! How glad I am to see you!" He twittered excitedly. "This whole business has me most upset. Most upset."

"*Mon dieu,* Tattertweet, what is wrong? Do control yourself. Herkimer Parrot is here," he said grandly. "There is no reason to—how do you say?—decompose yourself."

The tea was wheeled in at that moment. I took the opportunity to say to Parrot, "The word you mean is discompose. Decompose is decay."

Parrot waved a hand. "Ah, yes. Never, I fear, shall I master completely this English of yours."

Suddenly he hurried to the end of the room. Glancing that way to see what had caught his interest, I noticed that one of a pair of pictures was hanging crookedly. Parrot cannot stand objects which are not symmetrical.

With a quick flick of the hand he turned the picture. As he walked away satisfied, I could see that both pictures were now tilted exactly the same. As he came up to me, Parrot said, "Everything must be exact, Hasseling, exact! Order and method, Hasseling, always order and method!"

The butler had gone and Mr. Tattertweet invited us to be seated.

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"M. Parrot. This is most distressing! Oh, but here, do have a cup of tea." He handed cups around. "I have had you wait in here so we would not be disturbed. Best place to be alone, you know. No one ever uses the waiting room. Not even to wait in." He tittered nervously.

Parrot was staring in dismay at the amber liquid in his cup. He has acquired no taste for tea, but heroically he took a sip. "And now, *mon cher*. You have a little problem for me?" he inquired gently.

"What? Oh, yes, yes. It is the dear Duchess. Or rather it is Jennifer. The Duchess, you know, dotes on Jennifer. Gives her the best of everything. Nothing too good for Jennifer. And now," Mr. Tattertweet said distractedly, "Jennifer has disappeared. The Duchess is frantic. Simply frantic! M. Parrot, you must find Jennifer!"

"Bien entendu! Have no fear, *mon ami!* I, Herkimer Parrot, will locate the missing one! It is a matter of putting the little gray cells to work. Describe—no. The Duchess will be better able to do this. You have done your part, Tattertweet. You have brought the great mind of Herkimer Parrot to bear on the baffling problem. I shall see the Duchess now."

"Of course, of course! I shall announce your desire to see her." Mr. Tattertweet bustled away.

"Come, Hasseling." Parrot went to the door. I followed meekly. It is always a pleasure to watch the great Herkimer at work.

In the hall I stooped to gather up a piece of dirt which was on the carpet, before Parrot should see it and be offended by its presence. I put it carefully in a bronze ashtray on a small table.

Parrot looked at the speck with distaste and plucked it from the ashtray, holding it carefully between thumb and forefinger. He stooped and lifting a corner of the carpet, placed the particle under it. "Orderliness, Hasseling. Always be neat."

I was chastened. Quite unintentionally I had cluttered the ashtray and disarranged its neat cleanliness. My embarrassment was relieved by Tattertweet who reappeared and led us into the Duchess' presence.

As Tattertweet began to speak, the Duchess, a still handsome woman of fifty-odd, motioned him regally to silence. "M. Parrot? I am pleased that you are so prompt. Jennifer must be found!"

"Rest assured, Your Grace. Now, I have need of certain information —a description, the circumstances surrounding the disappearance."

"Quite. No, do stay, dear Tattertweet," the Duchess of Teaberry said, as Tattertweet rose and began to edge from the room. "You are such a comfort." She resumed speaking to Parrot. "Immediately after breakfast yesterday, the parlormaid saw Jennifer in the garden.

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She likes to sit by the pond—it seems to relax her. When Curler, the butler, announced lunch, she did not come—and no one has seen her since!"

"Calm yourself, Madame la Duchesse. I shall find her—I present you my word."

"Thank you, M. Parrot. Oh, you asked for a description of Jennifer. She is lovely, so lovely. Long red, really auburn hair. It has such a beautiful wave! A piquant, alive, intelligent face. Large soulful brown eyes. When she looks at you, you cannot help but give her your heart. She is so amiable, too!"

The Duchess pulled a bell cord beside her. When the butler appeared, she said, "Curler, bring the picture of Jennifer which stands on the mantel. M. Parrot can see her beauty better from a photograph than from my description, I am sure."

The butler glided away. The Duchess of Teaberry let a tear slide down her cheek. Parrot and I tactfully turned away until she could compose herself.

"Well, Hasseling," Parrot said quietly, but with a twinkle, "it seems you are in luck. Always you have the penchant for the auburn hair—and the missing Jennifer has the auburn hair!"

I interposed hastily, "Really, Parrot, that is not important now."

The butler returned and handed a large framed color photograph to the Duchess, who after a sad inspection of it, handed it to Parrot. "As you see, M. Parrot, Jennifer is exceedingly beautiful."

I edged behind Parrot to get a better view. The photograph showed a magnificent girl with Titian hair, arresting blue eyes, and a marvelous figure. She had a wonderfully interesting, alive face. She was in riding clothes; in one hand she held a crop, and her other hand rested on the head of a fine Irish Setter.

Parrot was nodding thoughtfully. "This is Jennifer. And what is the other?"

"Oh, that is Trish. Patricia, you know, but we call her Trish. It is more appropriate."

Parrot nodded. "*Bien.* A few questions, if you will. All has been as usual as of late? There has been nothing from the ordinary?"

"Nothing has been different. Except . . . but it hardly seems worth mentioning."

Parrot bent his head forward encouragingly, stroking his mustache gently.

"For several weeks Jennifer has not been her usual self. She has been moody, pacing restlessly about, peering from windows, almost as if she were watching for someone." The Duchess broke off abruptly to peer searchingly at Parrot. "Are you not taking notes, Monsieur?"

"Ah, Madame la Duchesse. Herkimer Parrot stores everything here." He tapped his head. "The

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little gray cells—they are everything!"

"Oh, yes. Well. Jennifer has not been eating too well, either—I have been so afraid for her health. Oh, M. Parrot," the Duchess' hauteur deserted her and I felt pity for her, "do you think she knew something was going to happen?"

"Jennifer shall be found, Your Grace!" Parrot announced grandly.

Murmuring her thanks, the Duchess made her way from the room. Tattertweet spoke from the depths of the chair where he had been sitting all the while. "M. Parrot. You would like to speak with the servants? I shall arrange it." He hurried away.

"Ah, *mon ami!* What is it you are thinking?"

"Parrot, this is all very well, talking to servants. But shouldn't we be looking for clues?"

Parrot sighed. "You would have me crawl on the ground searching for footprints and spying in the bushes? No, no, Hasseling. It is the gray cells which must do the work. Facts arranged with order and method. That is where Herkimer Parrot excels. And yes, already the glimmer of an idea has come to me. But I cannot yet be certain. We must talk to the servants."

The servants were summoned. Parrot had the parlormaid up first. "Mademoiselle, you were the last to see Miss Jennifer?"

The girl nodded sullenly.

"*Bien*. You will tell me exactly what it was you saw."

"I was dusting the knickknacks in the morning room, sir. I was—well, I just looked out the window for a minute."

I hid a smile. The girl had probably been slacking off, daydreaming when she was supposed to be working.

"Jennifer was sitting by the pond. She likes to sit there after breakfast. Then I heard Mrs. Payne coming, so I nipped back to the dusting."

"Did you glance through the window again, mademoiselle?"

"Well, yes, sir. About a half hour later. Jennifer wasn't there, but that's not unusual. She sometimes takes a stroll around the grounds."

"*Merci*, mademoiselle."

Curler was summoned next. He entered, the "compleat" gentleman's gentleman.

"Curler, what do you know of the events of yesterday morning?"

"I served the breakfast, sir, at the usual time. Eight o'clock that would be. I left the room as is my custom. At 8:45 precisely I re-entered the breakfast room to gather the soiled dishes. The room was empty." The butler spoke stiffly.

"And the breakfast? Was it eaten?"

"No, sir. The greater portion of it remained on the plates."

"Ah! Now, Curler, you have noticed the unusual conduct of Jennifer?"

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"M. Parrot, I do not concern myself with matters which are not my business."

Parrot persisted. "You have noticed nothing?"

"Mrs. Curler—she is cook, sir—could likely tell you what you wish to know."

Parrot proceeded to the kitchen. It is not good, he informed me, to interrupt a cook at her work. The state of agitation induced by wondering what is happening in her kitchen disrupts the questioning. I admired Parrot's psychological grasp of such essentials.

Mrs. Curler, a lively, chatty woman, was delighted to tell Parrot what he wished to know. She had none of her husband's reticence.

"Yes, indeed, M. Parrot, Jennifer has been acting strangely for several weeks. Moping about. Poor dear, my heart just ached for her! The Duchess, you know, would not let her have many companions. Most of the locals aren't good enough for her. Humpf!" Mrs. Curler sniffed.

"There has been nothing else unusual?"

"Well, there's one thing." Mrs. Curler stirred something savory in a pan, then went on eagerly. "Every evening, now, Mr. Thomas Royce —from Barclay Cottage, down the road a bit—has walked past with his dog. A handsome pair they are. Mr. Royce is young and very good-looking—every bit as much a gentleman as some of these toffs the Duchess is always asking down. You should see him and his red dog—just like a sporting print, they are." Mrs. Curler sighed. "Well, M. Parrot, on the evenings when young Tom was going by, that is when Jennifer was most restless."

"Did you see Miss Jennifer yesterday?"

"No, I didn't. But if you ask me, Thomas Royce could tell you something!"

Parrot thanked Mrs. Curler, then took his leave. He was very thoughtful. "Hasseling, I have the idea. I am sure it is the truth for which we are searching."

"Ah, ha! One of the servants was lying? They do know Jennifer's whereabouts?" I questioned eagerly.

"No, *mon ami,*" he responded. "Even when people lie to me, they tell me something. Herkimer Parrot is not deceived. But this time they do not lie. Come, we must see the Duchess."

He was striding off. I hurried after him. Tattertweet was found and informed of Parrot's desire to see the Duchess. He scurried away, bobbing his head nervously, to return in a few minutes with the reply that the Duchess would see M. Parrot immediately.

We made our way to her room. Upon entering, Parrot went to the Duchess where she was seated at a small writing table.

The Duchess looked up wearily.

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"Have you discovered anything, monsieur?"

"Permettez, Your Grace, a few more questions. Jennifer has been restless, *oui.* But she never before stayed away overnight?" The Duchess replied in the negative. Parrot continued, "Ah! And are there young companions about for her to associate with? One she has interests in common with? Perhaps *ce jeune homme?"*

The Duchess looked at him. "Really, M. Parrot, I cannot see that these questions have a bearing on Jennifer's disappearance."

"Au contraire, Your Grace. It is spring, the blood runs warm, the heart looks, *n'est ce pas,* for romance!"

The Duchess sprang to her feet, a look of horror spreading across her face. "Oh, no, no! She can't have run off—no, not that!"

"Consider. She has shown no inclination to go away before. Always she has been the quiet one. Then, *voila!* One fine day there is the spring in the air, the heart pounds, the pulse races, all caution is discarded! Ah, yes," he said, nodding his pear-shaped head sagely. "My good friend, Hasseling here, has knowledge of this of which I speak."

I began a strongly worded protest, but he waved me to silence with a flourish of his mustache.

"Yes, *mon cher,* you protest, but it is true. The auburn-haired ones —always they have the effect on you—spring or no!" He turned his attention to the Duchess. "The facts are thus, Your Grace. Jennifer does not eat; she is restless, moody; of a sudden she leaves with no sign to anyone; and it is spring. You yourself, Madame la Duchesse, have said she peers from the window as if watching for someone. In short, she is pining; her actions are the actions of one very young, searching for *l'amour!"*

The Duchess, hands clasped to her face, was shaking her head as though she could not bear to believe what Parrot was saying.

"Madame la Duchesse. There is *ce jeune homme* near here, *oui?"*

"But I cannot believe it—not my Jennifer!"

"Mais oui! My little gray cells tell me that such and such are thus, and such and such are so. From the servants I have learned of a young man who often strolls by the gates on fine evenings, walking a large red dog. On those evenings Jennifer has been most restless. Ah, yes, Madame la Duchesse, I think you will find Herkimer Parrot is right," he said complacently.

"But his background! What is this—this—Who are his parents? From where does he come? Oh, no, not my little Jennifer!" A sob escaped the Duchess.

"Your Grace, I myself cannot bear the careless arrangements of nature. For me the carefully planned garden, the suitable marriage—these are worthy of consideration. But

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for the young—ah, this is not so. The heart rules the mind. *Comme ca.* That is the way it marches."

"Will you bring her back to me, M. Parrot? She must come back before it is too late, before she does something rash." She looked at him pleadingly.

"Madame la Duchesse, I shall bring Jennifer home. Come, Hasseling. We shall take Tattertweet and proceed to the house of the young man, this Thomas Royce."

We were soon driving toward Barclay Cottage.

It was quite a small place, not to be compared with the Duchess'. I knocked upon the door. It was opened by a handsome young man.

"Yes?"

"You are, I believe, Thomas Royce?"

"Yes."

Parrot stepped up. "We have come to take Jennifer home. She is here." There was no hint of a question in Parrot's manner or voice. He was completely sure. I was not. I thought he was basing his solution on very flimsy evidence.

Mr. Royce threw back his head and gave a burst of laughter.

"So you've tracked her down, have you? Come to break up the romance. And Jennifer so lonely for love. Well, you're too late. The nuptials have already taken place!"

I gasped. "Too late?" The impact of what he had said took away my wondering astonishment that as usual Parrot had been correct in his deductions.

Royce nodded. Turning around, he called, "Jennifer. Come here. They've sent someone to take you home."

He opened the door wider. "Jennifer!"

A streaking auburn bundle of Irish Setter with soulful brown eyes and an intelligent, piquant face landed with a joyful bound on Parrot.

As he disengaged himself from the tangle, I could see that Thomas Royce was highly amused at the spectacle. Parrot regained his feet and his dignity. But Thomas Royce got in the parting shot, just before he closed the door.

"I say, old boy, don't feel too bad that you were late. Perhaps the Duchess will send you a puppy in gratitude for locating Jennifer."

Sadly Parrot walked away. Never before have I seen him so downhearted—at least, not after solving so difficult a case.

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B. S. I.: Bomb, Shakespeare, Induction

In this, the Month of the Baker Street Irregulars, we bring you one of the superspoofs of our time—a brilliant pseudo-serious piece of Sherlockiana that we urge you to read . . .

The author, Dr. Banesh Hoffmann, is a VIP—a truly distinguished theoretical physicist. He was educated at Oxford (B.A., first class honors) and at Princeton (Ph.D.). At present he is Professor of Mathematics at Queens College of the City University of New York. He is the author of more than 70 research and expository articles on various "deeps" of physics—including the quantum theory (see his tour de force, THE STRANGE STORY OF THE QUANTUM, *Harper, 1947, translated into Spanish, French, and Polish). He has been a member of the Institute for Advanced Study three times, and collaborated with Einstein and Infeld on an article which has become a classic in the theory of relativity.*

Dr. Hoffmann is also the author of THE TYRANNY OF TESTING (*Collier Books, 1965*), *a book which created quite a stir in academic circles and will never be forgotten (or perhaps forgiven). This book did "a sort of Sherlockian job on the powerful organizations that make the multiple-choice and true-false tests that are (in Dr. Hoffmann's view) corrupting contemporary education." You may recall the controversy that raged on Dr. Hoffmann's crusading book which contended that multiple-choice and true-false tests "reward superficiality, ignore creativity, and penalize the person with a probing, subtle mind."*

For example, consider this multiple-choice question: "Which does not belong with the others? Cat, dog, lion, rabbit." The wanted answer was lion, as the only nondomestic animal listed. But, says Dr. Hoffmann, why could it not have been rabbit (the only noncarnivorous animal of the four), or dog (the only one of the four that barks), or reducing this whole type of testing to final absurdity, cat—as the only listed animal with nine lives! (The good Doctor is no stiff and severe academician—he has a wry and gentle humor.) These tests, you understand, are the ones that can keep an imaginative, logical-minded student (with, say, a detectival mystique) out of college; or, as Dr. Hoffmann observed, "Maybe that's how all the accepted students got in!"

Bravo, Dr. Banesh Hoffmann of the Baker Street Irregulars—for your courage and your perception—and for the 'tec treat you now give us.

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SHERLOCK, SHAKESPEARE, AND THE BOMB

by BANESH HOFFMANN

I HAVE NOT OFTEN KNOWN SHERLOCK HOLMES TO JEST. WHEN HE DID SO IN the old days, it was usually in a grim manner that boded ill for some malefactor. But Holmes and I have both become more mellow, and a growing humor and warm sentiment have enriched our latter years.

Each Christmas, no matter how bitter the weather, I struggle down to Sussex for our annual reunion, and for this event Holmes always prepares some special intellectual treat to keep alive the memory of our active days together. Usually it is an account of some fictitious case, told with such a wealth of corroborative detail that one would almost believe it true. But last year proved an exception.

It was Christmas morning, and we were still at breakfast. Holmes had been unusually silent, idly fingering some books that he had brought to the table.

I glanced curiously at the titles. "Well, Holmes," I said. "What is the case to be this time?"

"I am afraid, my dear Watson, that I have no case to tell you this Christmas," he replied. And then, seeing my disappointment, he hastened to add, "But I have something just as good. Better, indeed, since it rests on documentary evidence."

I settled happily into my chair. Outside the snow was falling silently from a bleak and darkening sky. But the fire crackled cheerily in the hearth, and suddenly the world was warm and cozy.

My friend observed my mood approvingly. "Literary research has always attracted me," he said with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "In no other field does the art of detection find such free rein. I am embodying the results of my recent investigations in a little monograph that may have important influence on Shakespearean scholarship. Hitherto the reputation of Shakespeare has rested, as you know, on his achievements as playwright and poet. Whether it can continue to do so is doubtful."

"You amaze me."

"Pray do not interrupt," said my companion with mock severity. "I shall

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require your closest attention. The discoveries that I shall present to you suggest the need for a complete revaluation of Shakespeare's works. For they imply that his writings conceal, beneath a cloak of poetry and drama, unparalleled feats of clairvoyance and prognostication."

I was about to protest, but he stilled me with a gesture.

"You do not believe me, I perceive. But you have not seen the evidence. The first hints of this startling possibility came no more than a few decades ago. With the advent of Wireless Broadcasting, men began to look for hidden messages in *The Tempest,* their attention roused by the prophetic name of the character *Ariel.*"

"But the spelling is wrong," I burst out.

Holmes frowned at the interruption. "Surely you are aware that Shakespeare, like other Elizabethans, was notoriously careless in his spelling. He even wrote his own name in different ways on different occasions."

I was silent, and my friend continued his discourse. "Most scholars would have nothing of such speculation. Like you, they felt that the faulty spelling marred what was at best no more than a trifling coincidence. But some were not so easily deterred. They pointed out that the play was full of magical happenings that often bore uncanny resemblance to the modern miracle of wireless—so much so that Ariel might well be the personification of wireless itself. They persisted in their researches and soon came upon a startling passage that they felt could not be laughed away."

He picked up one of the books and thumbed through it. "I have here Caliban's speech in Act 2, Scene 3 of *The Tempest,* telling of the magic performed by Ariel and Prospero. Permit me to read you a little of it:

Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices . . ."

"Why," I cried, "this is extraordinary! It is wireless to the life. A modern could hardly have described it more aptly. Even the announcer is there."

Holmes chuckled. "You find it interesting, I see. The early researchers were naturally exultant. Their theory was bearing fruit and they looked forward confidently to rapid developments. But unfortunately Caliban's speech proved to be an isolated instance which they could not convincingly follow up. When no further confirmation was forthcoming, interest lagged and the skeptics remained profoundly unconvinced."

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"I hardly blame them."

"Aha! But the situation has now changed dramatically. My recent discoveries, which are mainly concerned with the sonnets, bring the strongest possible support to the almost forgotten thesis of the early researchers. I shall submit evidence from two of the sonnets to prove not only that Shakespeare was a major prophetic genius, but that his knowledge of the future extended to technical details of the most intimate and intricate sort."

He picked up another volume. "These are the sonnets of Shakespeare. Kindly read me the beginning of the twelfth sonnet."

I read with growing bewilderment:

"When I do count the clock that tells the time
And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;
When I behold the violet past prime,
And sable curls all silver'd o'er with white—"

"That is enough," he interjected. "Consider it carefully. It reads like poesy pure and simple. But we must look beneath its superficial aspect. Allowing for the inevitable distortion that the hidden meaning must suffer when expressed as though it were innocent poetry, I shall now point out to you unmistakable indications that these lines refer to Einstein's theory of relativity."

"My dear Holmes!"

"You think that impossible?"

"Oh, by no means," I said sarcastically. "I was just wondering how you come to be familiar with the theory of relativity."

"You do me far less than justice. To a man like myself, who has written what experts have described as the last word on the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus, the Einstein theory could hardly present formidable difficulties. You forget that our unlamented friend Professor Moriarty was a mathematician of the first rank. When I was ferreting out the details of his vast organization of crime I had to outguess him at every turn, and to do so I had to put myself mentally in his place. Since he was a mathematician I had to become one too. You know how thorough I am. By intense study I was able to master his most abstruse mathematical works. It was no very great step from there to relativity and the quantum theory."

"The *what* theory?"

"The quantum theory. The theory that tells how atoms exist in certain

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quantum states and how they change from one quantum state to another. Surely you have heard of it?"

"No—indeed, I have not."

"You amaze me, Watson. A theory that ranks with relativity in importance, and you have not heard of it! But you have interrupted the thread of my discourse. We were about to study the twelfth sonnet. Kindly read the first line again."

" 'When I do count the clock that tells the time.' "

"Exactly. Did not Einstein arrive at his theory of relativity by rejecting the notion of absolute time? Did he not reason in terms of the behavior of clocks moving relative to one another? Did he not, in the words of Shakespeare, *count the clock that tells the time?* In one small line Shakespeare has packed the essence of the theory of relativity."

"Surely that is rather far-fetched," I murmured dubiously.

"Oh, yes. One line alone can easily be dismissed as a coincidence. I must certainly go further if I am to convince you. But once we realize that the sonnet refers to the theory of relativity, the significance of the second line is immediately clear. How was Einstein's theory tested? Was it not during a total eclipse of the sun, with *the brave day sunk in hideous night?* If this is still a coincidence it is by now an enormous one. Nor is this all. In the third line the *violet past prime* is, of course, the ultraviolet, though the significance of the line as a whole is rather obscure.* But the fourth line is absolutely irrefutable. Here it is: 'And sable curls all silver'd o'er with white.' You know my methods. What do you make of it?"

I read it over several times, but had to confess that it conveyed nothing to me beyond an obvious reference to graying hair.

Holmes rubbed his hands with glee. "It is evident that you have not studied your relativity carefully. This line, among other things, is a remarkable description of the celebrated ether drift experiment of Michelson and Morley which led to the Einstein theory. As you know, that experiment employed lightly *silver'd o'er* mirrors to break the light into two beams. These beams, by their interference, produced dark and bright fringes, which Shakespeare here describes as *sable* and *white.*"

"But, Holmes, the line obviously refers to hair, not to light."

"Superficially, yes. But permit me to draw your attention to this excellent treatise on the electromagnetic theory of the eminent Nineteenth Century physicist James Clerk Maxwell. As you doubtless know," he continued while I vigorously shook my head, "Maxwell discovered that light

*Holmes was not infallible. He missed the point that the ultraviolet referred to Einstein's theory of the photoelectric effect, for which, primarily, he won the Nobel Prize.—B. H.

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behaves like an electromagnetic wave. Here are his justly famous equations governing the behavior of light waves in empty space."

He pointed to the following formidable array of symbols:

$$\text{div } H = 0, \quad \text{curl } E + \frac{1}{c}\frac{\partial H}{\partial t} = 0$$

$$\text{div } E = 0, \quad \text{curl } H - \frac{1}{c}\frac{\partial E}{\partial t} = 0$$

"Do you perceive the word *curl?* Since it appears twice in these equations, Shakespeare uses the plural, *curls.*"

"So much for my ridiculous theory that the line referred to hair," I said ruefully.

"Precisely. But we are not done with this line yet, by any means. There is more in it than meets the eye, for Shakespeare employs something of the techniques of James Joyce. With the word *curls* alone Shakespeare shows us that he is talking about light. But he makes assurance double sure by using the word *silver'd* too.

"Look at the equations once more. Note the syllable *div* appearing twice in them. From the word *silvered* we can form the word divs. And the remaining letters form the German word *leer,* meaning *empty.* Thus we have here three separate clues—*curls, divs,* and *empty*—to show that Shakespeare is referring to Maxwell's equations for light waves in empty space. Moreover . . ."

"Holmes, you are mistaken," I broke in triumphantly. "You have not noticed that Shakespeare spells it *silver'd,* with an apostrophe instead of in full."

"Pshaw! Do you think my advancing years have so dulled my powers of observation that I should miss a clue that even Lestrade would have detected? Of course Shakespeare uses an apostrophe. He did so intentionally. Make a long arm for the Oxford English Dictionary—the first volume, please. Now what have we here?"

" 'Apostrophe,' " I read. " 'A figure of speech, by which the speaker or writer suddenly stops in his discourse, and turns to address pointedly some person or thing, either present or absent . . .' "

"Exactly," said Holmes. "Could one ask for a stronger indication that the line is addressed to us rather than the casual reader?"

"But why us?"

"Upon my word, you are being singularly obtuse today, Watson. Here is the title page of the sonnets. Are they not dedicated to 'W. H.'? Could that be anyone but Watson and Holmes? And there is another little indi-

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cation that you have missed. In the Oxford Dictionary you will note five illustrations of the use of the word apostrophe. Only one of these has any reference to Shakespeare. Observe what it says."

He pointed to the following:

> 1830. Coleridge Lect. Shaks. II. 118. The apostrophe to light at the commencement of the third book (of *Paradise Lost*) is particularly beautiful.

"You see, Watson? The reference to light is absolutely explicit."

"Holmes," I laughed, "I am utterly convinced."

"My dear Watson, I have hardly begun to present the evidence. All this has been no more than a prelude. There is one sonnet, the sixty-fourth, that describes the present atomic situation so aptly that every line of it can be understood as a message for today."

"But if Shakespeare was a seer, why did he not come straight out with his predictions instead of casting them in such obscure and subtle form?"

"You regard that as an objection? It is one of the strongest points in favor of my thesis. Had Shakespeare couched his prophetic utterances in forthright terms, would they have survived? Had he frankly asserted that they were prophecies, would he have been believed, or would he rather have been dismissed as a harmless lunatic? To keep his prophecies alive till the days of their fulfillment he had to conceal their deeper meaning by giving them the appearance of poetry—poetry of such magnificence that they would endure to the end of time. As he himself said in the fifty-fifth sonnet:

"Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme."

"You have an answer to every objection," I conceded. "Bring on the sonnet to the atomic bomb."

"Oh, it is quite a well-known one. Glance over it to refresh your memory."

He paced nervously up and down as I read the following:

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
The rich proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the watery main,

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Increasing store with loss and loss with store;
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay;
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,
That Time will come and take my love away.
This thought is as a death, which cannot choose
But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

I was puzzled. "There is nothing here about the atomic bomb. Are you sure this is the one you meant?"

"Yes, that is the one—Sonnet Sixty-four. It reads like poetry, does it not? It has a superficial meaning of its own. It stands four-square as a work of art, complete in itself. All this we perceive and marvel at. Now let us seek out its hidden meaning line for line. How does it begin?"

" 'When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced.' "

"Just so. In view of the twelfth sonnet we have just discussed, we may take *Time* to refer to relativity and thus to Einstein's famous equation $E=mc^2$. For the correct continuity we must skip to the third line: *When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed.* These are the steel towers that supported the atomic bomb in the first bomb test in New Mexico, U.S.A., in July of 1945. Truly the *lofty towers* were *down-razed* by $E=mc^2$. It is, of course, hardly necessary to add that the word *sometime* means that the test occurred in the summertime."

"Hardly necessary at all," I murmured.

"How does the second line go?"

" 'The rich proud cost of outworn buried age.' "

"Ah, yes. This may seem obscure at first. But only if we do Shakespeare the injustice of assuming that he did not foresee the modern method of estimating the age of the rocks. This is done by examining the by-products of their decaying radioactive constituents. If Shakespeare knew of this, was it not the height of poesy for him to speak of uranium deposits as *outworn buried age? The rich proud cost* now needs no further explanation. We are all taxpayers. Kindly read the fourth line."

" 'And brass eternal slave to mortal rage.' "

"Now, Watson, this is something *récherché*. What do you think the line means?"

"Why, it is clear enough. Well, no—not quite. In fact, now that I think of it, it is rather obscure. What does it mean?"

"Observe closely. The key to its meaning is the pair of words *slave to*. This is an ingenious contraction, formed by combining two v's into one. Separate them out and we have the phrase *Slav veto*, which refers unmis-

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takably to the behavior of the Russian delegation to the United Nations. The Slav veto is here characterized as *brass eternal,* and we are told that it engenders in us *mortal rage.* The line is so topical and specific that it could almost have been culled from the front pages of today's newspapers. Indeed, we have difficulty reminding ourselves that it was written in the time of Elizabeth, more than three hundred years ago."

"I am delighted to find Shakespeare on our side in the cold war," I remarked. "Shall I read the next line?"

"The next three lines are to be taken together. Kindly read all three."

" 'When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the watery main.' "

"Thank you. This has to do with the Bikini bomb tests, which sent a shower of radioactive water over the island of Bikini, a *kingdom of the shore* from which the king and his subjects had previously been removed. That the island was not obliterated or permanently inundated by the explosions is indicated by the last of these lines, which tells how the firm soil won over the watery main. You see how admirably it all fits?"

"Amazing! But can you continue like this?"

"Oh, yes. The evidence piles up till its cumulative effect is overwhelming. What is the next line?"

" 'Increasing store with loss and loss with store.' "

"That is an easy one. As you see, it foretells the *increasing store* of atomic bombs in stockpiles, the words *loss and loss* being, of course, an oblique reference to Los Alamos, where the bombs were first designed. I see you are enjoying my little monograph."

"Indeed I am. It is positively delightful. I have never known you more brilliantly entertaining."

The compliment pleased him, for, though he muttered, "It is nothing," he blushed as he did so. "Come, Watson," he said, "we are wasting time. What comes next?"

" 'When I have seen such interchange of state.' "

"Ah. This is one for the specialists. It is a highly technical reference, showing how thoroughly Shakespeare understood the nature of modern atomic theory. Atomic physicists will recognize *interchange of state* as the purest quantum theory. And as if this were not enough indication, Shakespeare goes on, in the following line, to talk of *state itself confounded to decay.* This clearly refers to the radioactive decay of an atom, which is associated with a change in the quantum state of the nucleus."

"I must defer to your superior knowledge."

"The next line, *Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminate,* with its ominous

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opening word, tells subtly of the hydrogen bomb. For some reason Shakespeare decided to make the reference obscure. Perhaps he was unable to decide whether a hydrogen bomb could be made to work or not. More likely he realized that he was dealing with classified secret information and chose to be discreet lest his sonnet be destroyed by the Atomic Energy Commission. Be that as it may, the reference is definitely there, if one will but look for it."

"I see nothing specific."

"Naturally. It is cleverly hidden. Observe the innocent word *hath*. If we write it *H at H* it succinctly expresses the idea of hurling hydrogen nuclei at hydrogen nuclei, which is one way of causing a process of nuclear fusion. The high temperatures needed for any sort of nuclear fusion to occur on earth must be created by the explosion of an ordinary atomic bomb. Shakespeare wished to indicate this fact too.

"Let me put the problem to you as an exercise in literary craftsmanship: you are somehow to suggest an ordinary atomic explosion—not baldly and obviously, but with the art that conceals."

"I am utterly at a loss to do so," I confessed.

"You are no mean literary craftsman yourself, Watson—yet you are baffled. The more you ponder the problem the more you will admire Shakespeare's own solution. He solved it with the one word *ruminate*. For we may break this up into two parts—*rumina* and *te*. The former is an almost perfect anagram of *uranium*, while the latter gives the first and last letters of the phrase *two hundred and thirty-five*, U 235 being, of course, the explosive isotope of uranium.

"Moreover, in thus forming the bucolic word *ruminate*, Shakespeare links up with the first word of the line, *ruin*, by hinting at the bestial, cowlike existence to which we should all be reduced by hydrogen warfare. Could James Joyce have done any better?"

"Not even Shakespeare!"

"Come, Watson, this is no time for jesting. The next line is a melancholy one: *That time will come and take away my love*. Here *love* refers to the American monopoly of the atomic bomb, which was indeed our love. And time has already come and taken it away. *This thought is as a death*, Shakespeare goes on to say. Could one put it more tragically? And what of the final line: *But weep to have that which it fears to lose?* Does it not sum up the awful dilemma of modern man? We do not want the atomic bomb. We should all sleep far more soundly if it did not exist. Certainly we weep to have that which we fear to lose."

There was a moment of silence. Holmes reached for another book. "Since we began with *The Tempest*, it is fitting that *The Tempest* have

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the last word. If you still entertain any doubts as to Shakespeare's prophetic powers, ponder this dire prediction of atomic destruction. It is from Act 4, Scene 1:

"The cloud-capp'd towers [skyscrapers], the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind."

I could not suppress a sigh.

"Cheer up, Watson. Perhaps men will be wise and it will not come to that. Perhaps, after all, Shakespeare is not the prophet I have made him out to be. I trust you have enjoyed my Christmas fable despite its somber ending. Indeed, I perceive that you have, for you have let your breakfast get cold. Have some warm eggs, Watson."

"Thank you, Holmes. But no more bacon."

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THE UNKNOWN ELEMENT

by HARLAN W. GUMAER

MCKAY GLANCED AT THE CLOCK above the vault of Winston's First National Bank. It was nearly time now. He yawned and stretched, rising from his chair in the corner, wondering how he could be tense and sleepy at the same time. He straightened his blue uniform coat and spoke to Mary Guillow, the teller behind the first window.

"It's three o'clock. Almost time for the armored car, Mary."

She nodded. "All right, Fred, I'll remind Mr. Cleveland."

McKay watched her walk over and knock on Cleveland's door, then enter his office. He turned to look at Mrs. Harris, the other teller, but she was waiting on a customer and hadn't paid any attention. McKay told himself he had to act normally, but it was more difficult than he'd thought it would be. He was not feeling normal, not with the knowledge of what he was going to do only a few minutes from now.

He wandered over to the front door to watch for the armored car, letting his mind form the thought that would have surprised him a year, or even six months ago: "I am going to rob the bank. I, Fred McKay, am going to rob the First National Bank of Winston."

It was a warm day, one of the

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first days of spring. McKay stood at the door and looked down Main Street, an ordinary small-town street on a spring day—quiet, slow-moving, a little sleepy. In a few minutes the armored car would pull up to the curb in front of the bank and this Thursday, as on every Thursday, it would deliver the money needed to cash Friday's pay-checks.

They would deliver about $30,000, McKay thought. Sometimes a little less, sometimes a little more. A bank guard like himself might earn that in ten years—if he could wait that long. Ten years from now he would be 67, and he wasn't waiting.

He supposed that was how the idea had started—thinking about how old he would be, and how long he would have to wait with nothing to show for all the waiting. Then he saw the armored car coming up the street and he turned to call Mr. Cleveland. "They're here now, sir."

McKay stepped to one side of the door, drew his revolver, and held it at his hip as Cleveland came forward to greet the guards from the armored car. The delivery went smoothly; one trip for the coins, another for the cash. There was a moment's wait while Cleveland signed the receipt.

McKay holstered his revolver and walked outside with the guards, laughing at a joke, exchanging friendly insults. He watched them drive away before he turned and went back into the bank.

Inside, Cleveland was already seated at the desk to the right of the vault. With his usual precision he was counting and dividing the money, carefully noting which series of bills went into each of the steel drawers he had placed in front of him on the desk. Tonight the drawers would be locked in the vault; tomorrow morning they would be taken out and assigned to the tellers, who would count the money again, checking the amounts with Cleveland's tally before they used it to handle the pay-check rush.

McKay watched Cleveland for a minute, then turned to Mrs. Harris. "Time for coffee. I'll bring back the usual—three regulars and two blacks."

Mrs. Harris laughed. "Don't tell me you've forgotten that Mr. O'Connor isn't in today?"

Mary Guillow teased him. "Just like an old bachelor to forget when another man's wife is having a baby. Didn't you see the big 'Congratulations' sign we hung up in his office?"

"Okay," McKay grinned. "Two black and two regular, and I'll have a look at the sign when I come back with the coffee."

McKay left the bank, cursing himself, wondering how he could have forgotten a thing like that, wondering if he would have forgotten it on an ordinary day. He

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walked down the street past Hogan's Furniture Store, waving to Mike Wyska, who was standing in front of the pool parlor enjoying the sun. He turned the corner and entered the diner.

There were half a dozen people at the counter, most of them local businessmen stretching their ten-minute coffee break to half an hour. McKay greeted the men he knew, smiling, and got the attention of Linda Crane, the waitress.

"Linda, a regular coffee for here and two regulars and two black to go when I'm ready to leave." He continued on past the counter toward the passage leading to the rest rooms. "I'll be right back."

McKay stepped into the passageway and glanced behind him. There was no one seated in the booths and the people at the counter couldn't see him. With four quick steps he passed the rest rooms and went through the door at the rear of the passage into the alley behind the diner.

There he hesitated for a moment, feeling his heart begin to beat faster. He stooped down, reaching under the platform which held the diner's garbage cans, and pulled out a bulky shopping bag. Shielded from the street by the garbage cans, he pulled on the blue mechanic's coveralls which hid his uniform from neck to ankles. He put his uniform cap into the shopping bag and slipped a pair of light leather gloves from the bag over his hands. As he began walking quickly down the alley past the rear of the furniture store, he removed his upper plate from his mouth and put it into the bag.

There was a second alley that ran between the bank and the furniture store connecting with the alley behind the diner, and at the corner of the two alleys McKay paused again. He reached into the shopping bag for the rubber mask which would cover his entire head, pulled it on, and adjusted it. He slapped on an old felt hat which partially concealed the mask.

He walked down the alley into the street for the five most dangerous steps he had to take. If someone should see him now, before he could get inside the bank, there wouldn't be much chance of getting away.

No one was on the street except an old woman feeding money into a parking meter, and Mike Wyska, still enjoying the sun. Both of them were nearly a block away and in the wrong direction. If they saw anything, they saw only the back of a man dressed in blue coveralls entering the bank.

McKay pushed through the bank door sideways, using his shoulder, so that for a moment his back was to Mrs. Harris and Mary Guillow. He used the moment to flip the little sign on the door from *Open* to *Closed,* and to remove the .45 service automatic from the shopping bag.

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When McKay turned, the women, who had watched him come in, noticed first the mask, then the gun. For a space of two or three seconds they were shocked, stunned into immobility. Using the shock, not giving them time to think of pressing the alarm buttons by their feet, McKay spoke harshly, "Get back away from the counter. Get back! Now!"

They obeyed, and McKay moved quickly up to the counter, covering them and Cleveland, who had jumped up from the desk, with the gun. "Don't move. No trouble and no one gets hurt." It was difficult speaking without his upper denture, but it changed his vocal tone and altered his pronounciation. No one would recognize his voice.

McKay strode along the counter to the gate at the end, and keeping the gun trained on them, climbed over. He could have pressed the button which would have released the latch, but an outsider wouldn't have known that.

He forced them to lie face down, side by side, with their arms above their heads, behind Cleveland's desk. The shopping bag yielded handcuffs and he cuffed each of them to a leg of the desk.

Keeping below the level of the counter so that he couldn't be seen from the street, McKay began to fill the shopping bag with the cash from the desk. The desk had been the most important single object in his plan. Not only was it the place where the money was counted, where for a few short minutes the money would not be under lock, key, or combination, but the desk was also the only place in the bank where there was no alarm button within reach. By handcuffing each of them to a desk leg, McKay prevented anyone from using the alarm system or from standing upright and signaling for help.

Ignoring the coins, it took him less than half a minute to pack the banknotes into the shopping bag. "I'm going over by the door now," he said. "I've got to wait for a car and it may not come along for a minute or so. Don't start yelling because I'll be there and I'd have to come back and shut you up."

McKay hesitated, almost expecting an answer, but all three of them remained silent. He moved quickly then, back over the gate, the shopping bag in one hand, the gun in the other. At the door he dropped the gun into the bag and looked out at the street. No one was in sight; even Mike Wyska was gone from in front of the pool parlor. He went through the door, walked the five long steps, and turned into the alley.

On the way back to the diner McKay reversed the procedure he'd used before, stripping off the floppy hat, mask, and gloves. There was no room for them in the bag, which was almost filled with the money, so McKay carried them in his hand until he reached the shelter of the garbage cans.

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He quickly unzipped the coveralls, slipped them off, and rolled them into a small bundle with the other parts of his disguise. He dug his teeth and uniform cap out from under the money in the bag, then stuffed the shopping bag and the clothes bundle under the platform. He stood up, replaced his teeth, and put on his cap. Straightening his uniform, he checked the alley. It was clear.

He stepped out and re-entered the diner through the back door, pausing a moment in the passageway to adjust his face and his feelings. McKay was no longer a thief; he was a bank guard again.

He walked down the passage and back to the counter, found an empty stool with a cup of coffee on the counter in front of it, and sat down. According to the clock on the wall he had been gone seven minutes.

Linda Crane looked at him. "I was just going to call you. Your coffee's getting cold."

McKay smiled, surprised that he could smile, and said, "I guess I was daydreaming." He looked around. All the customers who'd been there before were still there, and a couple more had joined them. It seemed impossible they should be sitting here, talking about weather and sports as if nothing had happened. But nothing had happened—to them.

He forced himself to sit still, drink his coffee, and waste another three minutes before he asked Linda to fix the coffees to go out. Over the past month and a half McKay had gradually lengthened his coffee break from ten to fifteen minutes, so that on this one day it would not seem strange if he was gone even a little longer than usual. He was paying for the coffee, almost ready to leave, when one of the clerks from Hogan's Furniture Store burst through the door shouting, "Fred, the bank's been robbed! You'd better come quick!"

During the next two confusion-filled hours McKay acted the part of a bumbling, middle-aged bank guard. When the police learned he hadn't been present during the robbery, they ignored him, and he settled himself in his chair in the corner and watched the confusion escalate to chaos.

The Winston Police Department was a small-town force and as good as any other in dealing with small-town crimes; but no one, not even Chief Spicer, had ever been involved in a bank robbery. In fact, it took them nearly twenty minutes to locate Spicer, who had stayed after the Rotary luncheon to play cards. Until they found him, no one thought to phone the State Police and have roadblocks set up.

Mrs. Harris became hysterical, which complicated the problem of getting all three from the desk and prevented any of them from being questioned. A doctor quieted Mrs. Harris so that a carpenter was able

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to saw through the desk legs. A locksmith was needed to remove the handcuffs, and at the same time three patrolmen had to be detailed to control the crowd outside the bank. Spicer called the F.B.I. who promised to send an agent to Winston as soon as possible—perhaps in a couple of hours.

McKay sat back and watched and waited. When he had first become serious about committing the robbery, he had thought about the reaction of the police. There was no one on the police force who would have the intelligence and imagination to grasp the true significance of the fact that McKay had not been present when the robbery occurred, and having grasped that fact, have the initiative to investigate it. The F.B.I., with their attention to detail, would certainly check out his movements, but even if they did arrive in a few hours, they would not be able to accomplish much more than to unsnarl the mess the local police had made. They would not be able to get a real start until tomorrow morning and by then McKay would have retrieved the money from under the platform and moved it to a safer place. He would have destroyed the coveralls and the rest of the disguise; he would have thrown the gun into the river. By tomorrow morning they might speculate that McKay *could* have done it, they might even reconstruct *how* he'd done it; but there would be no evidence, nothing at all, to confirm their suspicions.

There was one man though, Darrell Carey, and he showed up at quarter of six as McKay, waiting, watching for him, had known he would. McKay was almost relieved when he saw Carey park his car across the street, get out, and walk toward the bank. If Carey didn't see the truth, if Carey failed, McKay was home free.

Carey spoke to the patrolman on guard at the door, then came inside. He stood just inside the door for a moment, looking around the deserted bank—a tall man whose height made him seem thinner than he really was. He saw McKay sitting in the corner and McKay rose from his chair to meet him.

"I heard about it over the car radio, Fred, and thought I'd drop in before I went home. Where is everyone?"

"In Mr. Cleveland's office. Chief Spicer's questioning Mr. Cleveland and Mary. Mrs. Harris was hysterical, so the doctor took her home."

"Why aren't you in there too?"

"I wasn't here when it happened," McKay said. "I was on my coffee break."

Carey smiled. "It was smart, choosing the time when the fewest possible people were in the bank—especially when the one person with a gun was not here."

"I feel pretty bad about it," McKay said, "drinking coffee while he

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was holding them up. Maybe I could have done something."

"It wasn't your fault." Carey glanced at the door to Cleveland's office. "I think I'll listen in for a minute."

McKay went back to his chair in the corner and sat down again. He was sweating and his hands were trembling, almost as bad a reaction as the first few minutes in the diner after the robbery. McKay had known from the beginning that there was nothing he could do about Carey. Perhaps that was the reason Carey frightened McKay so badly—Carey was the unknown element that McKay was not able to control.

Darrell Carey was a Deputy Sheriff. He had no jurisdiction over any crime taking place within the town limits—but that made no difference to Carey, just as it had made no difference to him on any other crime committed near Winston since he'd joined the Sheriff's Department four years ago. If Carey was interested, he'd be there; if he wasn't, the other law enforcement agencies usually requested the loan of his services.

In four years Carey had acquired a reputation for infallibility. He was a strange man. Everyone in Winston agreed on that. What kind of man would give up a lucrative law practice in New York City to become the youngest Captain of detectives in State Police history, and then give that up to join the Winston County Sheriff's Department? What kind of man would choose to live with a couple of hunting dogs and a mean gray alley cat in the middle of the woods on Shay's Hill? Yes, Carey was a strange man, and even Winston's teen-agers thought twice before "borrowing" a car for a joyride. You just couldn't figure Carey.

McKay sweated and waited. It was a little after six when Carey came out of Cleveland's office.

"Are they finished with the questioning?" McKay asked, keeping his voice calm.

Carey shook his head. "They're not getting anywhere—just asking the same questions over and over."

"The F.B.I. will want to ask them again when they get here," McKay said. "I guess it's going to be a long night."

"There was a phone call from the Bureau while I was in there," Carey said. "They can't get here until early tomorrow morning."

"How much longer do you think the questioning will last then?"

Carey smiled. "Spicer's tenacious, but it shouldn't last much longer. I would have stayed but I've got a cat and two dogs who'll never forgive me if they're not fed on time." He lit a cigarette. "Tell Spicer I'll probably drop by in the morning. And take it easy, Fred—don't blame yourself."

McKay watched Carey cross the street, get into his car, and drive away. It took a moment for McKay

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to realize what it meant. Carey was gone—gone home to dinner; and the F.B.I. wouldn't come until morning. He was safe, he'd made it. It was only a matter of time now—time to get the money and the disguise out of the alley.

McKay smiled. He had done it; he'd robbed the bank. For a moment he wished there was someone he could tell about it, boast to, but that impulse passed and he began to think about the future. He would continue to work at the bank, or, if he came under suspicion and the bank let him go, he'd find another job in town. There was no hurry. He would keep working—three, five years—then he would retire, leave Winston for Florida, maybe Arizona, where $30,000 would pay for the comforts he could not have had on social security and a small pension.

Chairs scraped. The door of Cleveland's office opened and McKay watched the people file out. Mary Guillow was first, looking lost, as if her world had been turned upside down; she was followed by the young policeman who had been taking notes. Cleveland and Spicer came out together, both of them looking tired, frustrated, and worried. Cleveland beckoned to McKay.

Spicer was saying, "I don't think we'll be able to trace the handcuffs. There are dozens of surplus outlets and mail-order houses that sell them."

Cleveland nodded and turned to McKay. "Fred, the bank will be closed tomorrow while the F.B.I. is here. I'd like you to come in early—seven thirty if you can make it."

McKay nodded.

"Look for me about then too," Spicer said.

"Darrell Carey said he'd be dropping in too," McKay said.

"No, I won't, Fred. It won't be necessary."

They turned. Carey was standing by the door. He was carrying a shopping bag in his left hand and there was a pair of blue coveralls rolled up and tucked under his left arm. He was looking at McKay, and he seemed disappointed, even saddened.

McKay felt nothing. He did not really hear Carey say, "I think you'd better hand over your gun to Chief Spicer, Fred," but he found himself doing it, mechanically, without taking his eyes from Carey or the shopping bag.

"Are you saying it was *Fred?*" Spicer exploded.

"It couldn't be," Cleveland said, unbelieving, "I would have recognised him."

Carey put the coveralls and the shopping bag on McKay's chair in the corner. Absently he searched his pockets for a cigarette. "Someone would have noticed it sooner or later, but the evidence would have been gone by then." He looked at McKay. "I caught it during the questioning I listened to," he said, finally finding his cigarettes, light-

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ing one, and turning to Mary Guillow, who was staring fixedly at McKay. "You remember, Mary, I asked you where O'Connor was, and you told me he hadn't come to work this morning because his wife was having a baby?"

"That was the only question you asked all the time you were with us," Cleveland said.

"Because neither of you, when you described the robbery step-by-step to Chief Spicer said anything about the thief checking O'Connor's office or asking where O'Connor was. And the thief should have done that—the holdup was too well-planned for the robber to forget about one of the people who should have been in the bank, one of the people he had to account for." Carey exhaled cigarette smoke. "But the thief didn't check O'Connor out. That was strange because how could he have known O'Connor wasn't here? Having a baby is a pretty sudden thing."

"We didn't know until nine o'clock when Mr. O'Connor phoned from the hospital," Mary said.

Carey nodded. He looked at McKay. "That gave it to me, Fred—that made me begin thinking in the right direction. You were the only one who wasn't in the bank when the robbery occurred who could have known that O'Connor wasn't here. So when I left, I went over to the diner and checked with Linda Crane. A couple more days and she would have been willing to swear you never even left the diner. She would have forgotten all about the time you were supposed to be in the rest room." Carey smiled. "By the way, someone's going to have a job cleaning up the alley behind the diner. I dumped out all the garbarge cans before I thought of looking under the platform."

There was a silence while Carey stubbed out his cigarette in an ashtray. Then he spoke to Spicer. "The money is in the shopping bag. I don't think you need me now. I think Fred will tell you about the rest of it, won't you, Fred?"

McKay smiled wryly. "Why not?"

"It was a good try, Fred, a real good try," Carey said. He looked very tired as he turned and walked toward the door.

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HERCULE POIROT AND THE BROKEN MIRROR

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

(continued from page 40)

Colonel Bury dropped into a chair, shook his head, sighed and said, "Terrible business, this, Riddle. Lady Chevenix-Gore is being wonderful—wonderful. Grand woman! Full of courage!"

Coming softly back to his chair, Poirot said, "You have known her many years?"

"Yes, indeed, I was at her coming-out dance. Wore rosebuds in her hair, I remember. And a white, fluffy dress. Wasn't anyone to touch her in the room!"

His voice was full of enthusiasm. Poirot held out the pencil to him.

"This is yours, I think?"

"Eh? What? Oh, thank you. Had it this afternoon when we were playing bridge. Amazing, you know, I held a hundred honors in spades three times running. Never done such a thing before."

"You were playing bridge before tea, I understand?" said Poirot. "What was Sir Gervase's frame of mind when he came in to tea?"

"Usual—quite usual. Never dreamed he was thinking of making away with himself. Perhaps he was a little more excitable than usual, now I come to think of it."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"Why, then! Tea-time. Never saw the poor chap alive again."

"You didn't go to the study at all after tea?"

"No, never saw him again."

"What time did you come down to dinner?"

"After the first gong."

"You and Lady Chevenix-Gore came down together?"

"No, we—er—met in the hall. I think she'd been into the dining room to see to the flowers—something like that."

Major Riddle said, "I hope you won't mind, Colonel Bury, if I ask you a somewhat personal question. Was there any trouble between you and Sir Gervase over the question of the Synthetic Paragon Rubber Company?"

Colonel Bury's face became suddenly purple. He spluttered a little. "Not at all. Not at all! Old Gervase was an unreasonable sort of fellow. You've got to remember that. He always expected everything he touched to turn out trumps!"

"So there *was* trouble between you?"

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"No trouble. Just damned unreasonable of Gervase!"

"He blamed you for certain losses he had sustained?"

"Gervase wasn't normal! Vanda knew that. But she could always handle him. I was content to leave it all in her hands."

Poirot coughed and Major Riddle, after glancing at him, changed the subject.

"You are a very old friend of the family, I know, Colonel Bury. Had you any knowledge as to how Sir Gervase left his money?"

"Well, I should imagine the bulk of it would go to Ruth. That's what I gathered from what Gervase let fall."

"You don't think that was at all unfair to Hugo Trent?"

"Gervase didn't like Hugo. Never could stick him."

"But he had a great sense of family. Miss Chevenix-Gore was, after all, only his adopted daughter."

Colonel Bury hesitated, then after humming and hawing a moment, he said, "Look here, I think I'd better tell you something. Strict confidence, and all that."

"Of course."

"Ruth's illegitimate, but she's a Chevenix-Gore all right. Daughter of Gervase's brother, Anthony, who was killed in the War. Seemed he'd had an affair with a typist. When he was killed, the girl wrote to Vanda. Vanda went to see her—girl was expecting a baby. Vanda took it up with Gervase—she'd just been told that she herself could never have another child. Result was, they took over the child when it was born, adopted it legally. The mother renounced all rights in it. They've brought Ruth up as their own daughter and to all intents and purposes, she *is* their own daughter, and you've only got to look at her to realize she's a Chevenix-Gore all right."

"Aha," said Poirot. "I see. That makes Sir Gervase's attitude much clearer. But if he did not like Mr. Hugo Trent, why was he so anxious to arrange a marriage between him and Mademoiselle Ruth?"

"To regularize the family position. It pleased his sense of fitness."

"Even though he did not like or trust the young man?"

Colonel Bury snorted. "You don't understand old Gervase. He couldn't regard people as human beings. He arranged alliances as though the parties were royal personages! He considered it fitting that Ruth and Hugo should marry, Hugo taking the name of Chevenix-Gore. What Hugo and Ruth thought about it didn't matter."

"And was Mademoiselle Ruth willing to fall in with this arrangement?"

Colonel Bury chuckled. "Not she! She's a tartar!"

"Did you know that shortly before his death Sir Gervase was drafting a new will by which Miss Chevenix-Gore would inherit only

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on condition that she marry Mr. Trent?"

Colonel Bury whistled. "Then he really *had* got the wind up about her and Burrows—"

As soon as he had spoken, he bit the words off, but it was too late. Poirot had pounced on the admission.

"There was something between Mademoiselle Ruth and young Monsieur Burrows?"

"Probably nothing in it—nothing at all."

Major Riddle coughed and said, "I think, Colonel Bury, that you must tell us all you know. It might have a direct bearing on Sir Gervase's state of mind."

"I suppose it might," said Colonel Bury doubtfully. "Well, the truth of it is, young Burrows is not a bad-looking chap—at least, women seem to think so. He and Ruth seem to have got as thick as thieves lately, and Gervase didn't like it—didn't like it at all. Didn't like to sack Burrows for fear of precipitating matters. He knows what Ruth's like. She won't be dictated to in any way. So I suppose he hit on this scheme. Ruth's not the sort of girl to sacrifice everything for love. She likes money."

"Do you yourself approve of Mr. Burrows?"

The Colonel delivered himself of the opinion that Godfrey Burrows was slightly hairy at the heel, a pronouncement which baffled Poirot completely, but made Major Riddle smile into his mustache.

A few more questions were asked and answered, and then Colonel Bury departed.

Riddle glanced over at Poirot who was sitting absorbed in thought.

"What do you make of it all, M. Poirot?"

The little man raised his hands. "I seem to see a purposeful design."

Riddle said, "It's difficult."

"Yes, it is difficult. But more and more one phrase, lightly uttered, strikes me as significant."

"What was that?"

"That laughing sentence spoken by Hugo Trent: 'There's always murder.' "

Riddle said sharply, "Yes, I can see that you've been leaning that way all along."

"Do you not agree, my friend, that the more we learn, the less and less motive we find for suicide? But for murder, we begin to have a surprising collection of motives!"

"Still, you've got to remember the facts—door locked, key in dead man's pocket. Oh, I know there are ways and means. Bent pins, strings—all sorts of devices. It would, I suppose, be *possible*. But do those things really work?"

"At all events, let us examine the position from the point of view of murder, not of suicide."

"Oh, all right. As *you* are on the

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scene, it probably *would* be murder!"

For a moment Poirot smiled.

"I hardly like that remark."

Then he became grave once more. "Yes, let us examine the case from the standpoint of murder. The shot is heard, four people are in the hall—Miss Lingard, Hugo Trent, Miss Cardwell, and Snell. Where are all the others?"

"Burrows was in the library, according to his own story. No one to check that statement. The others were presumably in their rooms, but who is to know if they were really there? Everybody seems to have come down separately. even Lady Chevenix-Gore and Bury met in the hall. Lady Chevenix-Gore came from the dining room. Where did Bury come from? Isn't it possible that he came, not from upstairs, but *from the study?* There's that pencil."

"Yes, the pencil is interesting. He showed no emotion when I produced it, but that might be because he did not know where I found it and was unaware himself of having dropped it. Let us see, who else was playing bridge when the pencil was in use? Hugo Trent and Miss Cardwell. They're out of it. Miss Lingard and the butler can vouch for their alibis. The fourth was Lady Chevenix-Gore."

"You can't seriously suspect her."

"Why not, my friend? I tell you, me, I can suspect everybody! Supposing that, in spite of her apparent devotion to her husband, it is the faithful Bury she really loves?"

"H'm," said Riddle. "In a way it has been a kind of *ménage à trois* for years."

"And there is some trouble between Sir Gervase and Colonel Bury about this company."

"It's true that Sir Gervase might have been meaning to turn really nasty. We don't know the ins-and-outs of it. It might fit in with that summons to you. Say Sir Gervase suspects that Bury has deliberately fleeced him, but he doesn't want publicity because of a suspicion that his wife may be mixed up in it. Yes, that's possible. That gives either of those two a possible motive. And it *is* a bit odd that Lady Chevenix-Gore should take her husband's death so calmly. All this spirit buinsess may be pure acting!"

"Then there is the other complication," said Poirot. "Miss Chevenix-Gore and Burrows. It is very much to their interest that Sir Gervase should not sign the new will. As it is, she gets everything on condition that her husband takes the family name—"

"Yes, and Burrows' account of Sir Gervase's attitude this evening is a bit fishy. High spirits, pleased about something! That doesn't fit with anything else we've been told."

"There is, too, Mr. Oswald Forbes. Most correct, most severe, of an old and well-established firm. But lawyers, even the most respect-

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able, have been known to embezzle their client's money when they themselves are in a hole."

"You're getting a bit too sensational, I think, Poirot."

"You think what I suggest is too like the motion pictures? But life, Major Riddle, is often amazingly like the cinema."

"It hasn't been, so far, in Westshire," said the Chief Constable. "We'd better finish interviewing the rest of them, don't you think? It's getting late. We haven't seen Ruth Chevenix-Gore yet, and she's probably the most important of the lot."

"I agree. There is Miss Cardwell, too. Perhaps we might see her first, since that will not take long, and interview Miss Chevenix-Gore last."

"Quite a good idea."

That evening Poirot had given Susan Cardwell only a fleeting glance. He examined her now more attentively. An intelligent face, he thought, not strictly good-looking but possessing an attraction that a merely pretty girl might envy. Her hair was magnificent, her face skillfully made-up. Her eyes, he thought, were watchful.

After a few preliminary questions, Major Riddle said, "I don't know how close a friend you are of the family, Miss Cardwell."

"I don't know them at all. Hugo arranged that I should be asked down here."

"You are a friend of Hugo Trent's?"

"Yes, Hugo's girl friend." Susan Cardwell smiled as she drawled out the words.

"You have known him a long time?"

"Oh, no, just a month or so." She paused and then added, "I'm by way of being engaged to him."

"And he brought you down here to introduce you to his people?"

"Oh, dear no, nothing like that. We were keeping it very hush-hush. I just came down to spy out the land. Hugo told me the place was just like a madhouse. I thought I'd better come and see for myself. Hugo, poor sweet, is a perfect pet, but he's got absolutely no brains. The position, you see, was rather critical. Neither Hugo nor I have any money, and old Sir Gervase, who was Hugo's main hope, had set his heart on Hugo making a match of it with Ruth. Hugo's a bit weak, you know. He might agree to this marriage and count on being able to get out of it later."

"That idea did not commend itself to you, mademoiselle?" inquired Poirot gently.

"Definitely not. Ruth might have refused to divorce him or something. I put my foot down. No trotting off to St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, until I could be there dithering with a sheaf of lilies."

"So you came down to study the situation for yourself?"

"Yes. And, of course, Hugo was

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right—the whole family was bug-house! Except Ruth, who seems perfectly sensible. She's got her own boy friend and wasn't any keener on the marriage idea than I was."

"You refer to M. Burrows?"

"Burrows? Of course not. Ruth wouldn't fall for a bogus person like that."

"Then who was the object of her affection?"

Susan Cardwell paused, stretched for a cigarette, lit it, and remarked, "You'd better ask *her* that. After all, it isn't my business."

"When was the last time you saw Sir Gervase?"

"At tea."

"Did his manner strike you as peculiar in any way?"

"Not more than usual."

"What did you do after tea?"

"Played billiards with Hugo."

"What about the shot?"

"That was rather odd. You see, I thought the first gong had gone, so I hurried up with my dressing, came dashing out of my room, heard, as I thought, the second gong, and fairly raced down the stairs. I'd been one minute late for dinner the first night I was here and Hugo told me it had just about wrecked our chances with the old man, so I fairly hared down.

"Hugo was just ahead of me and then there was a queer kind of pop-bang and Hugo said it was a champagne cork, but Snell said, 'No,' and besides, I didn't think it had come from the dining room. Miss Lingard thought it came from upstairs, but anyway we agreed it was a backfire, trooped into the drawing room, and forgot about it."

"It did not occur to you that Sir Gervase might have shot himself?" asked Poirot.

"I ask you, should I be likely to think of such a thing? The Old Man seemed to enjoy himself throwing his weight about. I never imagined he'd do such a thing: I can't think why he did it."

"An unfortunate occurrence."

"Very—for Hugo and me. I gather he's left Hugo nothing at all, or practically nothing."

"Who told you that?"

"Hugo got it out of old Forbes."

"Well, Miss Cardwell—" Major Riddle paused a moment, "I think that's all. Do you think Miss Chevenix-Gore is feeling well enough to come down and talk to us?"

"Oh, I should think so. I'll tell her."

Poirot intervened.

"A little moment, mademoiselle. Have you seen this before?"

He held out the bullet pencil.

"Oh, yes, at bridge this afternoon. Belongs to Colonel Bury, I think."

"Did he take it when the rubber was over?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Thank you, mademoiselle. That is all."

"Right, I'll tell Ruth."

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Ruth Chevenix-Gore came into the room like a queen. Her color was vivid, her head held high. But her eyes, like the eyes of Susan Cardwell, were watchful.

She wore the same frock she had on when Poirot arrived. It was a pale shade of apricot. On her shoulder was pinned a salmon-pink rose. It had been fresh and blooming an hour earlier, but now it drooped.

"Well?" said Ruth.

"I'm extremely sorry to bother you," began Major Riddle.

She interrupted him.

"Of course you have to bother me. You have to bother everyone. I can save you time, though. I haven't the faintest idea why the Old Man killed himself. All I can tell you is that it wasn't a bit like him."

"Did you notice anything amiss in his manner today? Was there anything at all abnormal?"

"I don't think so. I wasn't noticing—"

"When did you see him last?"

"Tea-time."

Poirot spoke, "You did not go to the study—later?"

"No. The last I saw of him was in this room. Sitting there."

She indicated a chair.

"I see. Do you know this pencil, mademoiselle?"

"It's Colonel Bury's."

"Have you seen it lately?"

"I don't really remember."

"Do you know anything of a disagreement between Sir Gervase and Colonel Bury?"

"Over the Paragon Rubber Company, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I should think so. The Old Man was rabid about it!"

"He considered, perhaps, that he had been swindled?"

"He didn't understand the first thing about finance."

Poirot said, "May I ask you a question, mademoiselle—a somewhat impertinent question?"

"Certainly, if you like."

"It is this—are you sorry that your father is dead?"

She stared at him.

"Of course I'm sorry. I don't indulge in sob stuff. But I shall miss him. I was fond of the Old Man. That's what we called him, Hugo and I, always. The 'Old Man'—you know—something of the primitive-anthropoid-original-Patriach-of-the-tribe business. It sounds disrespectful, but there's really a lot of affection behind it. Of course, he was really the most completely muddle-headed old ass that ever lived!"

"You interest me, mademoiselle."

"The Old Man had the brains of a bunny! Sorry to have to say it, but it's true. He was incapable of any kind of headwork. Mind you, he was a character—fantastically brave and all that. Could go careering off to the Pole, or fighting duels. I always think that he blustered such a lot because he really knew that his brains weren't up to much."

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Anyone could have got the better of him."

Poirot took the letter from his pocket.

"Read this, mademoiselle."

She read it through and handed it back to him.

"So that's what brought you here!"

"Does it suggest anything to you, that letter?"

She shook her head.

"No. It's probably quite true. Anyone could have robbed the poor old pet. John says the last agent before him swindled him right and left. You see, the Old Man was so grand and so pompous that he never really condescended to look into details. He was an open invitation to crooks."

"You paint a different picture of him, mademoiselle, from the accepted one."

"Oh, well—he put up a pretty good camouflage. Vanda backed him for all she was worth. He was so happy stalking round pretending he was God Almighty. That's why, in a way, I'm glad he's dead. It's the best thing for him."

"I do not quite follow you, mademoiselle."

Ruth said broodingly, "It was growing on him. One of these days he would have had to be locked up."

"Did you know, mademoiselle, that he was contemplating a will whereby you could inherit his money only if you married Mr. Trent?"

She cried, "How absurd! Anyway, I'm sure that could be set aside by law. I'm sure you can't dictate to people about whom they shall marry."

"If he had actually signed such a will, would you have complied with its provisions, mademoiselle?"

She stared.

"I—I—"

She broke off. For two or three minutes she sat irresolute, looking down at her dangling slipper. A little piece of earth detached itself from the heel and fell on the carpet.

Suddenly Ruth Chevenix-Gore said, "Wait!"

She got up and ran out of the room. She returned almost immediately with Captain Lake by her side.

"It's got to come out," she said rather breathlessly. "You might as well know now. John and I were married in London three weeks ago."

Of the two of them, Captain Lake looked far more embarrassed.

"This is a great surprise, Miss Chevenix-Gore—Mrs. Lake, I should say," said Major Riddle. "Did no one know of this marriage of yours?"

"No, we kept it quite dark. John didn't like that part of it much."

Lake said, stammering a little, "I—I know that it seems rather a rotten way to set about things. I ought

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to have gone straight to Sir Gervase—"

Ruth interrupted, "And told him you wanted to marry his daughter, and been kicked out on your head and he'd probably have disinherited me, raised hell generally in the house, and we could have told each other how nobly we'd behaved! Believe me, my way was better. If a thing's done, it's done. There would still have been a row—but he'd have come round."

Lake still looked unhappy.

Poirot asked, "When did you intend to break the news to Sir Gervase?"

Ruth answered. "I was preparing the ground. He'd been rather suspicious about me and John, so I pretended to turn my attentions to Godfrey. Naturally, he was ready to go quite off the deep end about *that*. I figured that the news I was married to John would come almost as a relief!"

"Did anybody at all know of this marriage?"

"Yes, I told Vanda. I wanted her on my side."

"And you succeeded?"

"Yes. You see, she wasn't very keen about my marrying Hugo—because he was a cousin, I think. She seemed to think the family was so batty already that we'd probably have completely batty children. That was probably rather absurd, because I'm only adopted, you know. I believe I'm some quite distant cousin's child."

"You are sure Sir Gervase had no suspicion of the truth?"

"Oh, no."

Poirot said, "Is that true, Captain Lake? In your interview with Sir Gervase this afternoon, are you quite sure the matter was not mentioned?"

"No, sir, it was not."

"Because, you see, Captain Lake, there is certain evidence to show that Sir Gervase was in a highly excitable condition after the time he spent with you, and that he spoke once or twice of family dishonor."

"The matter was not mentioned," Lake repeated. His face had gone very white.

"Where were you at eight minutes past eight this evening?"

"Where was I? In my house. At the end of the village, about half a mile away."

"You did not come up to Hamborough Close about that time?"

"No."

Poirot turned to the girl. "Where were you, mademoiselle, when your father shot himself?"

"In the garden."

"In the garden? You heard the shot?"

"Oh, yes. But I didn't think about it particularly. I thought it was someone out shooting rabbits, although now I remember I did think it sounded quite close at hand."

"You returned to the house—which way?"

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"I came in through this window."

Ruth indicated with a turn of her head the window behind her.

"Was anyone in here?"

"No. But Hugo and Susan and Miss Lingard came in from the hall almost immediately. They were talking about shooting and murders and things."

"I see," said Poirot. "Yes, I think I see now."

Major Riddle said rather doubtfully, "Well—er—thank you. I think that's all for the moment."

Ruth and her husband turned and left the room.

"What the devil—" began Major Riddle, and ended rather hopelessly, "It gets more and more difficult to keep track of this business."

Poirot nodded. He had picked up the little piece of earth that had fallen from Ruth's shoe and was holding it thoughtfully in his hand.

"It is like the mirror smashed on the wall," he said. "The dead man's mirror. Every new fact we come across shows us some different angle of the dead man. He is reflected from every conceivable point of view. We shall soon have a complete picture."

He rose and put the little piece of earth tidily in the wastepaper basket.

"I will tell you one thing, my friend. The clue to the whole mystery is the mirror. Go into the study and look for yourself, if you do not believe me."

Major Riddle said decisively, "If it's murder, it's up to you to prove it. If you ask me, I say it's definitely suicide. Did you notice what the girl said about a former agent having swindled old Gervase? I bet Lake told that tale for his own purposes. He was probably helping himself a bit, Sir Gervase suspected it, and sent for you because he didn't know how far things had gone between Lake and Ruth.

"Then this afternoon Lake told him they were married. That broke Gervase up. It was 'too late' now for anything to be done. He determined to get out of it all. In fact, his brain—never very well balanced at the best of times—gave way. In my opinion that's what happened. What have you got to say against it?"

Poirot stood still in the middle of the room.

"What have I to say? This: I have nothing to say against your theory—but it does not go far enough. There are certain things it does not take into account."

"Such as?"

"The discrepancies in Sir Gervase's moods today; the finding of Colonel Bury's pencil; the evidence of Miss Cardwell—which is very important; the evidence of Miss Lingard as to the order in which people came down to dinner; the position of Sir Gervase's chair when he was found; the paper bag

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which had held oranges; and, finally, the all-important clue of the broken mirror."

Major Riddle stared.

"Are you going to tell me that rigmarole makes *sense*?" he asked.

Hercule Poirot replied softly, "I hope to make it do so—tomorrow."

It was just after dawn when Hercule Poirot awoke the following morning. He had been given a bedroom on the east side of the house.

Getting out of bed, he drew aside the window blind and satisfied himself that the sun had risen, and that it was a fine morning.

He began to dress with his usual meticulous care. Having finished, he wrapped himself in a thick overcoat, a muffler round his neck.

Then he tiptoed out of his room and through the silent house down to the drawing room. He opened the French windows noiselessly, went out into the garden, and followed the terraced walk round the side of the house until he came to the windows of Sir Gervase's study. Here he stopped and surveyed the scene.

Immediately outside the windows was a strip of grass that ran parallel with the house. In front of that was a wide herbaceous border. The Michaelmas daisies still made a fine show.

In front of the border was the flagged walk where Poirot was standing. A strip of grass ran from the grass walk behind the border to the terrace. Poirot examined it carefully, then shook his head. He turned his attention to the border on either side of it.

Very slowly he nodded his head. In the right-hand bed, distinct in the soft mold, there were footprints.

As he stared down at them, frowning, a sound caught his ears and he lifted his head sharply.

Above him a window had been pushed up. He saw a head of red hair and the intelligent face of Susan Cardwell.

"What on earth are you doing at this hour, M. Poirot? A spot of sleuthing?"

Poirot bowed with utmost correctitude.

"Good morning, mademoiselle. Yes, it is as you say. You now behold a detective—a great detective, I may say—in the act of detecting!"

"I must remember this in my memoirs," Susan remarked. "Shall I come down and help?"

"I should be enchanted."

"I thought you were a burglar at first. Which way did you get out?"

"Through the drawing-room window."

"Just a minute and I'll be with you."

She was as good as her word. To all appearances Poirot was exactly in the same position as when she had first seen him.

"You are awake very early, mademoiselle?"

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"I haven't been to sleep really. I was just getting that desperate feeling one gets at five in the morning."

"It is not quite so early as that!"

"It feels like it. Now then, my supersleuth, what are we looking for?"

"Observe, mademoiselle, footprints."

"So they are."

"Four of them," continued Poirot. "See, I will point them out to you. Two going towards the window, two coming from it."

"Whose are they? The gardener's?"

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle! Those footmarks are made by the small dainty high-heeled shoes of a woman. See, convince yourself. Step, I beg of you, in the earth here beside them."

Susan hesitated, then placed a foot gingerly onto the mold in the place indicated by Poirot. She was wearing small high-heeled slippers of dark brown leather.

"You see, yours are nearly the same size. Nearly, but not quite. These others are made by a longer foot than yours. Perhaps Miss Chevenix-Gore's—or Miss Lingard's—or even Lady Chevenix-Gore's."

"Not Lady Chevenix-Gore—she's got tiny feet. People did, in those days—manage to have small feet, I mean. And Miss Lingard wears queer, flat-heeled things."

"Then they are the marks of Miss Chevenix-Gore's shoes. Ah, yes, I remember she mentioned having been out in the garden yesterday evening."

He led the way back round the house.

"Are we still sleuthing?" asked Susan.

"But certainly. We will go now to Sir Gervase's study."

He led the way, Susan Cardwell following.

The door still hung in a melancholy fashion. Inside, the room was as it had been last night. Poirot pulled the curtains and admitted the daylight.

He stood looking out at the border a minute or two, then he said, "You have not, I presume, mademoiselle, much acquaintance with burglars?"

Susan Cardwell shook her red head regretfully.

"I'm afraid not, M. Poirot."

"The Chief Constable, he, too, has not had the advantages of a friendly relationship with them. His connection with the criminal classes has always been strictly official. With me that is not so. I had a very pleasant chat with a burglar once. He told me an interesting thing about French windows—a trick that could sometimes be employed if the fastening was sufficiently loose."

He turned the handle of the left-hand window as he spoke; the middle shaft came up out of the hole in the ground, and Poirot was able to pull the two doors of the window toward him. Having opened them

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wide, he closed them again—closed them without turning the handle, so as not to send the shaft down into its socket.

He let go of the handle, waited a moment, then struck a quick jarring blow high up on the center of the shaft. The jar of the blow sent the shaft down into the socket in the ground—and the handle turned of its own accord.

"You see, mademoiselle?"

"I think I do."

"The window is now closed. It is impossible to *enter* a room when the window is closed, but it *is* possible to *leave* a room, pull the doors to from outside, then hit it as I did, and the bolt goes down into the ground, turning the handle. The window then is firmly closed, and anyone looking at it would say it had been closed from the *inside*."

"Is that"—Susan's voice shook a little—"is that what happened last night?"

"I think so, mademoiselle."

Susan said violently, "I don't believe a word of it."

Poirot did not answer. He walked over to the mantelpiece, then wheeled sharply round.

"Mademoiselle, I have need of you as a witness. I have already one witness—Mr. Trent. He saw me find this tiny sliver of looking glass last night. I spoke of it to him. I left it where it was for the police. I even told the Chief Constable that a valuable clue was the broken mirror. But he did not avail himself of my hint. Now you are a witness that I place this sliver of looking glass—to which, remember, I have already called Mr. Trent's attention—into a little envelope—so. And I write on it—so—and seal it up. You are a witness, mademoiselle?"

"Yes—but—but I don't know what it means."

Poirot walked over to the other side of the room. He stood in front of the desk and stared at the shattered mirror on the wall in front of him.

"I will tell you what it means, mademoiselle. If you had been standing here last night, looking into this mirror, you could have seen in it *murder being committed* . . ."

For once in her life Ruth Chevenix-Gore—now Ruth Lake—came down to breakfast in good time. Hercule Poirot was in the hall and drew her aside before she went into the dining room.

"I have a question to ask you, Madame."

"Yes?"

"You were in the garden last night. Did you at any time step in the flowerbed outside Sir Gervase's study window?"

Ruth stared at him.

"Yes, twice."

"Ah! *Twice*. How twice?"

"The first time I was picking Michaelmas daisies. That was about seven o'clock."

"Was it not rather an odd time of day to pick flowers?"

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"Yes, it was, as a matter of fact. I'd fixed the flowers yesterday morning, but Vanda said after tea that the flowers on the dinner table weren't good enough. I had thought they would be all right, so I hadn't done them fresh."

"But your mother requested you to do them? Is that right?"

"Yes. So I went out just before seven. I took them from that part of the border because hardly anyone goes round there, and so it didn't matter spoiling the effect."

"Yes, but you went there a *second* time, you said?"

"That was just before dinner. I had dropped a spot of brilliantine on my dress—just by the shoulder. I didn't want to bother to change, and none of my artificial flowers went with the yellow of that dress. I remembered I'd seen a late rose when I was picking the Michaelmas daisies, so I hurried out and got it and pinned it on my shoulder."

Poirot nodded his head slowly.

"Yes, I remember that you wore a rose last night. What time was it when you picked that rose?"

"I don't really know."

"But it is *essential,* Madame. Consider—reflect—"

Ruth frowned. She looked swiftly at Poirot and then away again.

"I can't say exactly," she said at last. "It must have been—oh, of course—it must have been about five minutes past eight. It was when I was on my way back round the house that I heard the gong go, and then that funny bang. I was hurrying because I thought it was the second gong and not the first."

"Ah, so you thought that—and did you not try the study window when you stood there in the flowerbed?"

"As a matter of fact, I did. I thought it might be open, and it would be quicker to come in that way. But it was fastened."

"So everything is explained. I congratulate you, Madame."

"What do you mean?"

"That you have an explanation for everything—for the mold on your shoes, for your footprints in the flowerbed, for your fingerprints on the outside of the window. It is very convenient, that."

Before Ruth could answer, Miss Lingard came hurrying down the stairs. There was a queer purple flush on her cheeks, and she looked a little startled at seeing Poirot and Ruth standing together.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "Is anything the matter?"

Ruth said angrily, "I think M. Poirot has gone mad!"

She swept by them and into the dining room. Miss Lingard turned an astonished face on Poirot.

He shook his head.

"After breakfast," he said, "I will explain. I should like everyone to assemble in Sir Gervase's study at ten o'clock."

He repeated this request on entering the dining room.

Susan Cardwell gave him a quick

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glance, then transferred her gaze to Ruth. When Hugo said "Eh? What's the idea?" she gave him a sharp nudge in the side, and he shut up obediently.

When he had finished his breakfast, Poirot rose and walked to the door. He turned and drew out a large old-fashioned watch.

"It is five minutes to ten. In five minutes—in the study."

Poirot looked round him. A circle of interested faces stared back at him. Everyone was there, he noted, with one exception, and at that very moment the exception swept into the room. Lady Chevenix-Gore came in with a soft, gliding step. She looked haggard and ill.

Poirot drew forward a big chair for her, and she sat down.

She looked up at the broken mirror, shivered, and pulled her chair a little way round.

"Gervase is still here," she remarked in a matter-of-fact tone. "Poor Gervase. He will soon be free now."

Poirot cleared his throat and announced, "I have asked you all to come here so that you may hear the true facts of Sir Gervase's suicide."

"It was Fate," said Lady Chevenix-Gore. "Gervase was strong, but his Fate was stronger."

Colonel Bury moved forward a little.

"Vanda—my dear."

She smiled up at him, then put up her hand. He took it in his. She said softly, "you are such a comfort, Ned."

Ruth said sharply, "Are we to understand, M. Poirot, that you have definitely ascertained the cause of my father's suicide?"

Poirot shook his head.

"No, Madame."

"Then what is all this rigmarole about?"

Poirot said quietly, "I do not know the cause of Sir Gervase Chevenix-Gore's suicide, *because Sir Gervase Chevenix-Gore did not commit suicide*. He did not kill himself. *He was killed.*"

"Killed?" Several voices echoed the word. Startled faces were turned in Poirot's direction. Lady Chevenix-Gore looked up, said, "Killed? Oh, no!" and gently shook her head.

"Killed, did you say?" It was Hugo who spoke now. "Impossible. There was no one in the room when we broke in. The windows were fastened. The door was locked on the inside, and the key was in my uncle's pocket. How could he have been killed?"

"Nevertheless, he was killed."

"And the murderer escaped through the keyhole, I suppose?" said Colonel Bury skeptically. "Or flew up the chimney?"

"The murderer," said Poirot, "went out through a window. I will show you how."

He repeated his maneuvers with the window.

"You see?" he said. "That was

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how it was done! From the first I could not consider it likely that Sir Gervase had committed suicide. He had pronounced egomania, and such a man does not kill himself.

"And there were other things. Apparently, just before his death, Sir Gervase sat down at his desk, scrawled the word *SORRY* on a sheet of notepaper, and then shot himself. But before this last action he had, for some reason or other, altered the position of his chair, turning it so that it was sideways to the desk. Why? There must be some reason. I began to see light when I found, sticking to the base of a heavy bronze statuette, a tiny sliver of looking glass.

"I asked myself, how does a sliver of broken looking glass come to be there?—and an answer suggested itself to me. The mirror had been broken, not by a bullet, *but by being struck with the heavy bronze figure*. That mirror had been broken *deliberately*.

"But why? I returned to the desk and looked down at the chair. Yes, I saw now. It was all wrong. No suicide would turn his chair round, lean over the edge of it, and then shoot himself. The whole thing was arranged. The suicide was a fake!

"And now I come to something very important—the evidence of Miss Cardwell. Miss Cardwell said that she hurried downstairs last night because she thought that the *second* gong had sounded. That is to say, she thought that she had already heard the *first* gong.

"Now observe, *if* Sir Gervase *was* sitting at his desk in the normal fashion when he was shot, where would the bullet go? Traveling in a straight line, it would pass through the door, if the door were open, and *hit the gong!*

"You see now the importance of Miss Cardwell's statement? No one else heard that first gong, but, then, her room is situated immediately above this one, and she was in the best position to hear it. It would consist of only one single note, remember.

"There could be no question of Sir Gervase's shooting himself. A dead man cannot get up, shut the door, lock it, and arrange himself in a convenient position! Somebody else was concerned, and therefore it was not suicide, but murder. Someone whose presence was accepted by Sir Gervase, who stood by his side talking to him.

"Sir Gervase was busy writing, perhaps. The murderer brings the pistol up to the right side of his head and fires. The deed is done! Then quick, to work!

"The murderer slips on gloves. The door is locked, the key put in Sir Gervase's pocket. But supposing that one loud note of the gong has been heard? Then it will be realized that the door was *open*, not *shut*, when the shot was fired. So the chair is turned, the body rearranged, the dead man's fingers

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pressed on the pistol, the mirror deliberately smashed.

"Then the murderer goes out through the window, jars it shut, steps, not on the grass, but in the flowerbed where footprints can be smoothed out afterwards; then round the side of the house and into the drawing room."

He paused and said, *"There was only one person who was out in the garden when the shot was fired.* That person left her footprints in the flowerbed and her fingerprints on the outside of the window."

He came toward Ruth.

"And there was a motive, wasn't there? Your father had learned of your secret marriage. He was preparing to disinherit you."

"It's a lie!" Ruth's voice came scornful and clear. "There's not a word of truth in your story. It's a lie from start to finish!"

"The proofs against you are very strong, Madame. A jury *may* believe you—or may *not!*"

"She won't have to face a jury."

The others turned—startled. Miss Lingard was on her feet. Her face had altered. She was trembling all over.

"I shot him. I admit it! I had my reasons. I—I've been waiting for some time. M. Poirot is quite right. I followed him in here. I had taken the pistol out of the drawer earlier. I stood beside him talking about the book—and I shot him. That was just after eight.

"The bullet struck the gong. I never dreamt it would pass right through his head like that. There wasn't time to go out and look for it. I locked the door and put the key in his pocket. Then I swung the chair round, smashed the mirror, and, after scrawling 'Sorry' on a piece of paper, I went out through the window and shut it the way M. Poirot showed you.

"I stepped in the flowerbed, but I smoothed out the footprints with a little rake I had put there earlier. Then I went round to the drawing room.

"I had left the window open. I didn't know Ruth had gone out through it. She must have come round the front of the house while I went round the back. I had to put the rake away, you see, in a shed. I waited in the drawing room till I heard someone coming downstairs and Snell going to the gong, and then—"

She looked at Poirot.

"You don't know what I did then?"

"Oh, yes, I do. I found the bag in the wastepaper basket. It was very clever, that idea of yours. You did what children love to do. You blew up the paper bag and then hit it. It made a satisfactory big bang. You threw the bag into the wastepaper basket and rushed out into the hall. You had established the time of the suicide—and an alibi for yourself.

"But there was still one thing that worried you. You had not had time to pick up the bullet. It must

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be somewhere near the gong. It was essential that the bullet should be found in the study somewhere near the mirror. I don't know when you had the idea of taking Colonel Bury's pencil—"

"It was just then," said Miss Lingard. "When we all came in from the hall. I was surprised to see Ruth in the room. I realized she must have come from the garden through the window. Then I noticed Colonel Bury's pencil lying on the bridge table. I slipped it into my bag. If, later, anyone saw me pick up the bullet, I could pretend it was the pencil. As a matter of fact, I didn't think anyone saw me pick up the bullet. I dropped it by the mirror while you were looking at the body. When you questioned me, I was very glad I had thought of the pencil."

"Yes, that was clever. It confused me completely."

"I was afraid someone must have heard the real shot, but I knew everyone was dressing for dinner, and would be shut away in their rooms. The servants were in their quarters. Miss Cardwell was the only one at all likely to hear it, and she would probably think it was a backfire. What she did hear was the gong. I thought—I thought everything had gone without a hitch . . ."

Mr. Forbes said slowly in his precise tones, "this is a most extraordinary story. There seems no motive —"

Miss Lingard said clearly, "There *was* a motive.'" She added fiercely, "Go on, ring up the police! What are you waiting for?"

Poirot said gently, "Will you all please leave the room? Mr. Forbes, ring up Major Riddle. I will stay here till he comes."

Slowly, one by one, the others filed out of the room. Puzzled, uncomprehending, shocked, they cast abashed glances at the trim, upright figure with its neatly parted gray hair.

Ruth was the last to go. She stood, hesitating in the doorway.

"I don't understand." She spoke angrily, defiantly, accusing Poirot. "Just now, you thought *I* had done it."

"No, no," Poirot shook his head. "No, I never thought that."

Ruth went out slowly.

Poirot was left with the little middle-aged prim woman who had just confessed to a cleverly planned, cold-blooded murder.

"No," said Miss Lingard. "You didn't think she had done it. You accused *her* to make *me* speak. That's right, isn't it?"

Poirot bowed his head.

"While we're waiting," said Miss Lingard in a conversational tone, "you might tell me what made you suspect *me*."

"Several things. To begin with, your account of Sir Gervase. A proud man like Sir Gervase would never speak disparagingly of his nephew to an outsider, especially someone in your position. You

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wanted to strengthen the theory of suicide. You also went out of your way to suggest that the cause of the suicide was some dishonorable trouble connected with Hugo Trent. That, again, was a thing Sir Gervase would never have admitted to a stranger.

"Then there was the object you picked up in the hall, and the very significant fact that you did not mention that Ruth, when she entered the drawing room, did so *from the garden*. And then I found the paper bag—a most unlikely object to find in the wastepaper basket in the drawing room of a house like Hamborough Close!

"You were the only person who had been in the drawing room when the 'shot' was heard. The paper-bag trick was one that would suggest itself to a woman—an ingenious homemade device. So everything fitted in. The endeavor to throw suspicion on Hugo, and to keep it away from Ruth. The mechanism of crime—and its motive."

The little gray-haired woman stirred.

"You know the motive?"

"I think so. Ruth's happiness—that was the motive. I fancy that you had seen her with John Lake—you knew how it was with them. And then with your access to Sir Gervase's papers, you came across the draft of his new will—Ruth disinherited unless she married Hugo Trent. That decided you to take the law into your own hands, using the fact that Sir Gervase had previously written to me. You probably saw a copy of that letter. What muddled feeling of suspicion and fear caused him to write originally, I do not know. He must have suspected either Burrows or Lake of systematically robbing him.

"His uncertainty regarding Ruth's feelings made him seek a private investigation. You used that fact and deliberately set the stage for suicide, backing it up by your account of his being very distressed over something connected with Hugo Trent. You sent a telegram to me and reported Sir Gervase as having said I should arrive 'too late.'"

Miss Lingard said fiercely, "Gervase Chevenix-Gore was a bully, a snob, and a windbag! I wasn't going to have him ruin Ruth's happiness."

Poirot said gently, "Ruth is your daughter?"

"Yes—she is my daughter. I've often—thought about her. When I heard Sir Gervase Chevenix-Gore wanted someone to help him with a family history, I jumped at the chance. I was curious to see my—my girl. I knew Lady Chevenix-Gore wouldn't recognize me. It was years ago—I was young and pretty then, and I had changed my name. Besides, Lady Chevenix-Gore is too vague to know anything definitely. I liked her, but I hated the Chevenix-Gore family. They treated me like dirt. And here was Gervase going to ruin Ruth's life with his

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pride and snobbery. But I determined that she should be happy. And she *will* be happy,—*if she never knows about me!*"

It was a plea—not a question.

Poirot bent his head gently. "No one shall know from me."

Miss Lingard said quietly, "thank you."

Later, when the police had come and gone, Poirot found Ruth Lake with her husband in the garden.

She said challengingly, "Did you really think that I had done it, M. Poirot?"

"I knew, Madame, that you could *not* have done it—because of the Michaelmas daisies."

"The Michaelmas daisies? I don't understand."

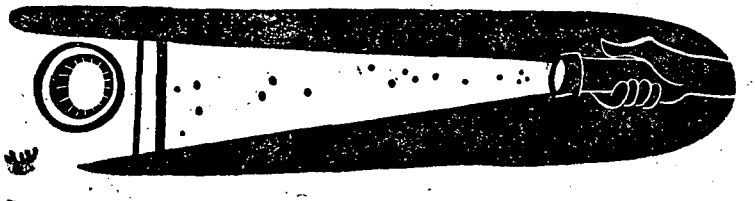
"Madame, there were four footprints and four footprints *only* in the border. But if you had been picking flowers there would have been many more. That meant that between your first visit and your second, *someone had smoothed all your first footsteps away*. That could only have been done by the guilty person, and since your second footprints had *not* been removed, you were *not* the guilty person. You were automatically cleared."

Ruth's face lightened.

"Oh, I see. You know—I suppose it's dreadful, but I feel sorry for that poor woman. After all, she did confess rather than let me be arrested—or at any rate, that is what she thought. That was—rather noble in a way. I hate to think of her going through a trial for murder."

Poirot said gently, "Do not distress yourself. It will not come to that. The doctor, he tells me that she has serious heart trouble. She will not live many weeks."

"I'm glad of that." Ruth picked an autumn crocus and pressed it idly against her cheek. "Poor woman. I wonder why she did it."



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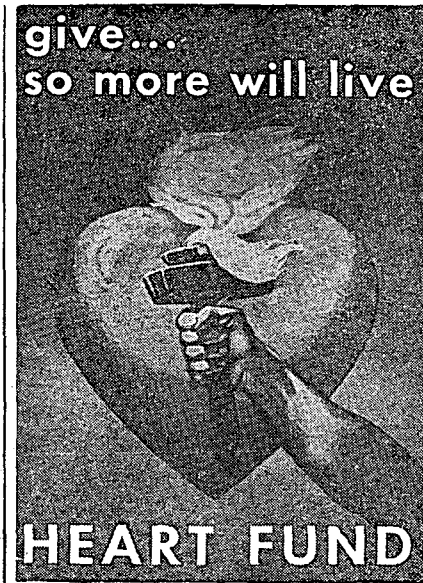

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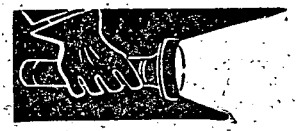

BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Please join your editors and me in a salute to Vincent Starrett, that Grand Master of the detective story (officially so proclaimed by Mystery Writers of America) who is celebrating his 80th year with a noble burst of bookish activity. He has just published his autobiography, BORN IN A BOOKSHOP (University of Oklahoma, $5.95), a joyous chronicle of "the Chicago renaissance" with lively chapters of book-talk to warm every bibliocockle in America. And he has launched a fascinating new mystery reprint series, with enlightening introductions: the Seagull Library of Mystery and Suspense (Norton, $3.95 each). The initial batch: Edgar Wallace's highly characteristic THE GREEN ARCHER (1924), Arthur Machen's curious fantasy THE TERROR (1917) and one of the permanent landmarks in the detective short story, R. Austin Freeman's THE SINGING BONE (1912). Start collecting them now!

Another autobiographical mystery writer is Ngaio Marsh, with BLACK BEECH AND HONEYDEW (Little, Brown, $5.95), an oddly reticent and imprecise, if charming, book. You will learn a great deal (all of it absorbing) about girlhood in New Zealand, a little (though not enough) about the problems of producing Shakespeare, and almost nothing about Miss Marsh's superb detectival craft (of which she seems almost ashamed).

★★★★ **DOUBLE BARREL, *by Nicolas Freeling*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Inspector Van der Valk studies Holland's most puritan province, in a delicate yet strong novel of place, atmosphere, people.

★★★★ ***GIDEON'S BADGE, By J. J. Marric*** (Harper & Row, $3.95)

Gideon's duty calls him to New York; and it's hard to say which is better: the usual fine compilation of credible police cases, or the lovely observation of travelers and of Anglo-American differences.

★★★★ **THE UNLOVED, *by Dolan Birkley*** (Crime Club, $4.50)

Dolores Hitchens (under a long-idle pseudonym) studies murder in a wealthy Southern California suburb; the novel is sensitive and alive.

(*Continued on page 130*)

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★★★ **THE GAME OF X, by Robert Sheckley** (Delacorte, $3.95)

Introducing William P. Nye, most involuntary and inept of secret agents, providing the liveliest comedy to hit Venice since the last visit of the Duke of Plaza-Toro.

★★★ **A FIREWORK FOR OLIVER, by John Sanders** (Walker, $3.50)

Another variant on The Spy Novel: a grand Sabatinesque costume swashbuckler about Nicholas Pym, agent for Oliver Cromwell.

★★★ **THE HOUND'S TOOTH, by Robert McDowell** (Mill-Morrow, $3.50)

First in a promising new series about the Kentucky State Police, with rich regional feel and some exciting ventures in spelunking.

★★★ **A WREATH OF ROSES, by John Blackburn** (Mill-Morrow, $3.50)

Adroid blend of espionage with epidemiology, as an unknown force releases the Black Death upon Europe.

★★★ **COFFIN IN MALTA, by Gwendoline Butler** (Walker, $3.50)

Vivid picture of Maltese life, with a kind of primitive epic grandeur to its central crime.

★★★ **THE MEANDERING CORPSE, by Richard S. Prather** (Trident, $3.95)

Shell Scott's first hardcover case, and a good one: all-out gang war with Shell in the middle, and ingenious twists (in either sense).

Anthology dept.: Ron Goulart's THE HARDBOILED DICKS (Sherbourne, $4.95) is the year's most welcome collection: 8 long stories from *Black Mask* and its best rivals, 1932-41; no Hammett, no Chandler, but abundant evidence that their colleagues worked the same side of the street. (Oddity: This is the first crime-pulp anthology in almost 20 years, and only the second one ever. Thar's still gold thar . . . or at the very least, high-assay silver.) . . . . ELLERY QUEEN'S LETHAL BLACK BOOK (Dell 2261, 50¢) contains 13 stories, all from previous E. Q. paperbacks. I don't think much of this anthological retreading; but I must admit that it's a good half-buck's worth of firstrate reading.

Short story dept.: Helen McCloy's THE SINGING DIAMONDS (Dodd, Mead, $3.50) contains 4 unqualified masterpieces of detective fiction (all from EQMM) along with some embarrassing science fiction trivia. . . . Ray Bradbury's THE AUTUMN PEOPLE (Ballantine U2141, 50¢) offers 8 early-Bradbury stories as adapted to comic book form (1952-53) by Albert B. Feldstein. The adaptations are much to my taste—and to Bradbury's, as he explains in an excellent foreword. . . . Two highly welcome reprints of volumes amassed from EQMM (both with forewords by E. Q.): PEOPLE VS. WITHERS & MALONE by Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice (Award A146F, 50¢) and the superb QUIET HORROR by Stanley Ellin (Signet D2806, 50¢).

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A queer story . . . a strange, odd, peculiar, unconventional, and, we think, unpredictable story. You will either hate it or love it.

THE COCONUT TRIAL

by DON KNOWLTON

WHEN YOU'RE SITTING AT A BAR—well, I don't know, but it's a queer thing—people talk with you. Rather, I should say, they talk *at* you. They say things they'd never tell their wives or their bosses or anybody else. People, I mean, you don't know, you've never seen before and you'll never see again. I think the anonymity of the situation has something to do with it.

Anyhow, there I was, in a bar on lower Broadway. It was a seedy bistro. There were all sorts of old stickers and placards on the walls, and the bartender looked as if he hadn't shaved in a week. Why was I there? Well, why was the young man on my left there? We were both getting quietly and steadily drunk. I guess there is no accounting for human behavior.

Well, this boy on my left—I call him a boy, but he was bigger than I am—this boy had volunteered the information that he was in the Navy, and currently on leave. He was a good-looking kid, and all of a sudden he began to talk. I realized afterward that what he told me must have been on his mind for a long time, but he probably hadn't dared tell it to his shipmates or to his folks back home; not just because they wouldn't believe it, but because it made him look silly. The reason he got into the mess, that is.

"You see," he began, "there we were on the destroyer, anchored about a mile off that island. They were playing war games and we were supposed to meet up with a tanker at that exact spot on that exact date, only something got fouled up and the tanker didn't get there. We learned all about it, of course, by radio, and we were told to stay right where we were; the tanker would show up the next day.

"Now that island was something. It was just a volcano. Not a big one, but a perfect one, like you see sometimes on Japanese screens. And there were little wisps of smoke coming out of the top of it.

"Around the edges of the island, along the sea, there were a few stretches of level land, and one of them stuck way out into the ocean. It was just a big finger of sand. Well, on that finger there was growing a row of coconut palms. They stood out against the horizon like evenly spaced sentinels.

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"Well, I'd been brought up in Connecticut, and until that moment I'd never even *seen* a palm tree, much less a coconut palm. And I wanted to get close enough to take a good look. Oh, I suppose it sounds funny, but put it the other way round. Suppose a native of New Guinea saw snow for the first time; I'll bet he'd want to get near enough so he could actually feel it with his hands.

"Anyhow, Bill Scott and I got permission to take a dinghy and row over to that line of coconut palms.

"We anchored the dinghy instead of pulling it part-way onto the beach, because we weren't sure about the tides. And then we went to look at those trees. Of course, that sort of thing may be old hat to you; but I tell you, I got a big kick out of those trunks that just went up and up without a single branch, with a big tuft of palm leaves on the very top and a cluster of nuts hanging just beneath them.

"There was one coconut on the ground, and I picked it up. Bill thought maybe he could knock another down with a stone, and he was looking around for a rock the right size when all of a sudden we were surrounded. In no time at all about twenty men had made a circle around us. Some had guns, some had spears, and some had knives. And they were all pointed at *us*."

The boy stopped talking for a moment, and sipped reflectively at his bourbon and water.

"Well!" he said. "The surprise was that there were men there at all. Because we'd assumed, all of us on the destroyer, that the island, with that live volcano on it, was uninhabited.

"What kind of men? Thinking about it afterwards, I'd say they were a mixture from 'way back—so far back that now they all looked pretty much alike. There was some Polynesian there, and some Negro, and some Malayan, and a tinge of Japanese, and at some time there must have been a white man in somebody's family tree.

"They weren't big men. They were brown, they didn't wear any clothes to speak of, and they obviously meant business. They jabbered in their own tongue, whatever it was, which of course we couldn't understand a word of, but we *could* understand what they wanted—which was for us to get going along a trail that led to the interior of the island. Which we did.

"After going through a sort of tunnel under big trees we came out to a little clearing. I wouldn't have thought there was that much land between the base of the volcano and the ocean, but there was. In the middle of that clearing there was a —well, I wouldn't call it a house exactly. I would hardly call it a shack, because part of it didn't have any walls, but it *did* have a roof, and

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it *did* have a porch. I could see women moving around in the back of the place but what struck us was the man who was sitting on the porch.

"He was a white man, though much tanned, of course; and he was old. His hair was snow-white. He must have once had a powerful build; but now his shoulders had shrunk and he had a paunch. But it was his face that held us. His brow was clear; but the lines on his cheeks were so deep that he looked —well, perhaps ravaged is the word. As if he had been driven by something or had suffered from something.

"Well, he got up from his chair and he listened patiently while all those natives chattered at him like monkeys and made threatening gestures at us. He answered them in their own language. Then he turned to us and he said—I'll try to remember his exact words—he said, 'You are charged with trespassing and stealing. These are serious offenses. You will therefore be subjected to a trial, which will be held immediately. I shall be the presiding judge, and I shall also act as interpreter for both sides.'

"With that he started up a little hill, with everybody following. He took us into a little open place in the forest, and there, believe it or not, was a big high chair. To its right, facing it, were two benches; and to its left, facing it, were two low chairs.

"The judge took the high chair and indicated that we were to sit in the two low ones. Then he motioned toward the benches, and twelve of the natives sat down there, six on each bench. All this time we had been talking our heads off, explaining how and why we had come to the island, but the judge paid not the slightest attention, so far as we could tell; and no wonder, because it sounded perfectly silly. And would those natives believe that two men had come ashore just to look at a coconut tree? When *they* had *lived* with and under coconut trees all their lives?"

"Did the judge tell you anything before the trial started?" I asked.

"He certainly did. He put himself down in that big chair with all the dignity in the world, and then he made us a speech. He said, 'You will be tried, in accordance with the rules of common law, by a jury of your peers. You may not consider them such, but on the basis of my past experience with the human race I can assure you they are. I have appointed counsel for the prosecution, and counsel for the defense. Before the trial begins I shall translate your explanation, as you gave it to me on the way up here, to both of them. After they have made their respective pleas I shall instruct the jury, who will then retire to arrive at their verdict.'

"So the trial began. Counsel for

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the prosecution turned out to be one of the most blood-thirsty villains I have ever seen in my life. He did not speak long, but he spoke violently; and we could see some of the jurors nodding their heads. When he had finished, the judge turned to us.

"'For your benefit,' he said, 'I shall give you the substance of the case for the prosecution. Trespassing is not allowed on this island; and stealing is a capital crime. The prosecution accuses you of both, since, when you were apprehended, one of you had a coconut in his hand and the other was about to knock one off a tree. The prosecutor asks for the death penalty. This, I might add, is usually carried out on this island by burning at the stake, since the natives prefer roasted meat to boiled. I might also mention that the prosecutor bases his case on a sound premise—that ignorance of the law is no excuse.'"

"My God!" I exclaimed. "Didn't you have the guts scared out of you?"

"Of course we did! But then counsel for the defense got up. He was a little chap, with a sort of wily, persuasive voice. Besides trying to make a case, I suspect that he even contrived to get into his appeal something about the quality of mercy. Anyhow, when he got through the judge again turned to us.

"'Your counsel,' he explained, 'has hit upon a most ingenious defense. He admits the trespassing; he admits your intent to steal the coconuts. But, he says, you assumed that the island was uninhabited—and how could anyone trespass on an island owned or occupied by nobody? As to ignorance of the law being no defense, there again he admits the correctness of the concept. But, he says, since you thought there was nobody on the island, you naturally assumed that there were no laws of which to be ignorant. And finally he mentioned—just casually, you understand—that the ship from which you had come is a warship of the United States of America . . . I shall now charge the jury.'

"Which he proceeded to do. What he told them I don't know—he didn't translate that for us. Then he sat down and the jury solemnly filed back behind a group of palms and went into a huddle. After about ten minutes they came back and sat down again on the benches.

"There was an exchange between the judge and one of the jurymen, which I assume was: Have you reached a verdict? Yes, we have. What is your verdict?—and then the verdict was pronounced. And *that* the judge did translate for us.

"'The verdict,' he declared, 'is *not* guilty. Gentlemen, I congratulate you.'

"And then he walked down the path with us, back to our boat. It was lucky we had anchored it, because the tide had changed and it

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was now about fifty yards offshore. We would have to swim for it.

"It was just as we were about to plunge into the water—*not*, by the way, taking a coconut with us—that Bill Scott couldn't contain himself any longer.

" 'Say,' he said to the judge, 'Who are you, anyhow? And why and how did you ever come to this island?' "

The lined face of the old judge took on a look that was positively terrifying.

" 'Why and how I came here,' he said, 'is something I shall never tell a living soul. As to who I am—or rather, I should say, who I *was*—'

"And suddenly his face softened.

" 'Well, boys,' he said, 'I will give you just one clue. I trust you have noticed that this is a *volcanic* island.'

"And with that he turned back up the path, and we swam to our dinghy.

"Next morning the tanker caught up with us, and we refueled, and were on our way again. But do you know, it took me a whole day before I caught on as to who that fellow was?"

"What fellow?" I asked.

"Why, the judge! The last thing he said was that it was a volcanic island. That did it."

"Well, who was he?"

"Judge Crater, of course."

EDITORS' NOTE: The disappearance of Judge Crater at the age of 41 is one of the most famous unsolved mysteries in American history. He "evaporated into the atmosphere" on the night of August 6, 1930, and at the time he vanished was Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York. He was last seen getting into a taxi just after having had dinner with a friend in the Billy Haas Restaurant at 332 West 45th Street, New York City. Wild speculations and exhaustive inquiries continued for a long time, including a recent false alarm in Yonkers, New York—but no trace of Justice Crater was ever found . . .

The story you have just read is not necessarily the answer to the riddle that has baffled American criminologists for more than a third of a century and has been called "the outstanding disappearance of modern times."

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The second problem for Richard Verner, the heuristician . . . about a mad-dog killer holding the police at bay and a child in danger of her life . . .

THE PROBLEM SOLVER AND THE HOSTAGE

by CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

RICHARD VERNER SAT BACK IN HIS desk chair, his right hand at his chin. His faintly red-Indian features were intent as he listened to the tall, well-built police officer across the desk.

"We had to get this man," said the Lieutenant, "before he did any more damage. He's been responsible for more than twenty robberies in the last six months, and he's trigger-happy—a mad dog. If anyone hesitates, he shoots them. Our trouble was, he hit different parts of the city, apparently at random, and we couldn't find any useful pattern. Well, by sheer persistence, trudging around the city with a drawing the witnesses agreed on, we finally learned of someone who looked like the man, living in a room on Fraley Street. This morning we went over to get him."

"What happened?"

The Lieutenant sighed wearily. "He must have spotted us. Just before we got there, he grabbed a little girl walking down the hall, yanked her into his room, locked the door, and shoved a couple of pieces of heavy furniture against it. Then he yelled, 'Try and come in, cops, and this kid gets it through the head.' "

Verner sat motionless for an instant. "You mean, if *you* went in, he'd shoot the *girl?*"

The Lieutenant gave an ironic nod. "That's where we were early this morning. That's where we are now."

Verner glanced at his watch. It was a little before noon.

"What did you do?"

"We finally offered to clear out and let him go, if he'd let the little girl come out unharmed. But he says he's too smart to trust a cop. The instant he comes out, he says, we'll shoot him. He's holding on to the girl."

"This can't go on forever."

"No, but what can we do? We've got to get him fast, to save the girl. But he's in a third-floor room with just one door, and that's locked and barricaded. He's got Venetian blinds at both windows. He can watch the street, but we can't see into the room. The thing is no bluff,

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either. He's a killer—take my word for it."

Verner glanced off at a corner of the room for an instant, then back to the Lieutenant. "Why bring this to me? I'm not a detective."

"Detectives," said the Lieutenant glumly. "I've already got detectives—they're running out my ears. And they're all up against the same blank wall I'm up against." He felt through his pockets. "We need detectives, but every now and then we also need a different point of view." He smoothed a newspaper clipping, and held it out.

Verner took the clipping and read: ". . . instrumental in unraveling the mystery was Richard Verner, a new kind of specialist known as a 'heuristician.' Mr. Verner explained that a heuristician is a professional problem solver, who works with other experts. Nearly all problems, he said, can be cleared up by much the same technique, provided the necessary expert knowledge is available."

The Lieutenant said doggedly, "Any expert knowledge you need in this problem, either we've got it or we'll get it for you. You just solve the problem. Get the little girl out of there alive. Get us out of this terrible mess."

The building was old, of dirty red brick, and stood on a street corner in a small shopping center. It was long and narrow, four stories high, with a flat roof. The narrow end of the building fronted on Fraley Street.

Verner and the Lieutenant stood well back in a vacant room across the street, looking out the window.

"That's his room," said the Lieutenant, "on the third floor, in the corner. He's got two windows. The front one looks out on Fraley Street. The other looks out to the side, over Meacham Street."

Across the way, in both windows on the third floor, dirty Venetian blinds swayed gently, as if moved by a faint breeze.

"Thanks to those blinds," said the Lieutenant, "he can watch both streets, and we can't see into his room from either street."

Verner studied the blinds. "But he can't see *up*."

"No. Little good that does us."

"Let's go over."

They went out into a back alley, emerged farther up the block, crossed Fraley Street, and approached a side door of the building, on Meacham Street.

The Lieutenant cleared his throat. "With minor exceptions, each floor is a carbon copy of the others." He led the way inside the old building, with its dark halls, high ceilings, long stairways, and moderately large rooms with heavy paneled doors and tall windows. The woodwork was scarred and dark, the walls were papered with long-faded patterns, and the plaster ceilings were stained and cobwebbed. When they reached the

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second floor, the Lieutenant said quietly, "Here's an exact duplicate of his room. His is directly overhead."

The room had a large sagging bed in the far corner, between the two windows. A heavy dark dresser stood against the wall to their right, a dark chest of drawers to their left, and beyond that, the door to a shallow closet. The Fraley Street window was in a direct line with the hall door.

Verner looked over the two heavy dark pieces of furniture, then glanced at the dark paneled door. He said quietly, "You say everything is the same above?"

"Except that his furniture's against the door."

They went up to the third floor, where a police sergeant and two uniformed policemen stood with their backs against the wall, guns in hand, and listened to threats that the girl could "die any minute." The sergeant shouted back that if anything happened to the girl, the police were coming in, their guns blazing.

As the Lieutenant watched uneasily, Verner methodically examined the door and its frame; then, frowning, Verner glanced up and down the hall at the narrow windows that supplied the light in the hallway.

From within the room came the sudden cry of a frightened child, a slap, silence, then muffled sobbing.

Verner and the Lieutenant moved grimly down the hall.

"Well," said the Lieutenant, "what do you think?"

"How much help can you get?"

"As much as I need."

"Can you get pneumatic drills working in that alley?"

"To cover the sound of whatever we do? Yes."

"Can you get a loudspeaker set up in that building across the street, to draw his attention away from the door?"

"Sure." The Lieutenant frowned. "But we've already thought of tear gas, pressure hoses, or a sharpshooter across the street. Remember, what we do has to be sure and fast."

Verner nodded.

"We've got one other little problem."

"What's that?"

"While the drills are working and the loudspeaker blaring, somebody has to be lowered headfirst down to the side window on Meacham Street."

Involuntarily, the Lieutenant glanced out toward the hard cement sidewalk.

"What's the point? We can't get in fast enough that way. And we can't risk a shot by somebody three stories up, hanging upside down by his feet."

"No, but if he goes down upright, his feet can be seen from inside before his head is down far enough for him to see anything

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through those slanted blinds. If he's upside down, he'll be able to see in almost as soon as he can be seen from inside. And if he's lowered along the edge of the side window, while the loudspeaker attracts the killer's attention to the front window on Fraley Street, he'll be able to see how that furniture is arranged against the door, without being seen himself."

"Who's going to perform this feat?"

"I think either you or I should do it. We've got to find out first-hand what I want to know."

The Lieutenant's eyes narrowed. He cast a brief but searching look at his companion. At first glance, Verner's tall frame gave a somewhat catlike appearance of lithe quick strength. His waist was narrow, and his face lean. A closer look, however, revealed something deceptive in his appearance—as of a building so proportioned that it seemed more strongly built close to than from a distance.

The Lieutenant shrugged. "I think whichever one of us is lighter ought to do it." The Lieutenant had the muscular build of a light-heavyweight boxer. "It's going to be hard hanging onto the ankles while he's lowered outside." He cleared his throat. "I weigh 175, myself."

Verner said, "You're elected—I weigh 184."

The pneumatic drills sent their racket reverberating between the buildings, and the boom of the loudspeaker urged the killer to release the little girl unharmed, as Verner, himself far out of the window, gripped the Lieutenant's ankles. Two burly policemen clung to Verner with bruising strength, but the Lieutenant kept motioning to be lowered even more.

For an instant it seemed as if they'd gone too far, and would all slide out the window to the pavement below. But then the Lieutenant signaled to be pulled up. They scraped him with painful slowness up the wall, got the red-faced, perspiring Lieutenant safely in, eased him to his feet, and moved back into the room. The Lieutenant drew a deep breath.

"The chest of drawers and the dresser." he said in a low voice, "are dark, like the door. They're the same size as the furniture downstairs. They're both pushed endwise against the door, about four inches apart."

Verner nodded. "Let's go down and get the blankets over the hall windows."

The trapped killer had turned hysterical and begun wildly to threaten the little girl's life.

The loudspeaker projected an earnest voice, "We've told you, as long as the girl isn't hurt—"

"Yeah, you told me! But you can never trust a cop!"

"If you won't believe us—"

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"All right, but I warn you—you'll never save this kid! I'm going to—"

From the shadows between the dark dresser and the dark chest of drawers standing side by side, there was a brief flash. As the shot echoed in the room, the killer's gun clattered to the floor. Dazed, his hand clasped at his shoulder, the impact threw him against the blinds and the frame of the front window facing on Fraley Street.

There was a silence that seemed deafening.

Outside, the pneumatic drills abruptly stopped. The loudspeaker was suddenly still.

"Stay right where you are," said a voice from outside the door, as clear and unmuffled as if it were inside the room. "Don't move, or you're a dead man."

Blinking, the killer glanced around the room, then back to the heavy dark dresser and bureau standing side by side against the dark, closed door. The voice seemed to have come from there, but the door was still shut. It couldn't be opened without shoving the furniture aside, and the furniture hadn't been moved. Feverishly, the killer glanced at his gun on the floor, then quickly all around the room.

Before he could move, there was the brief slap of a rope against the building, the side window on Meacham Street shot up, and the Venetian blinds were thrust back. A big catlike man with a faintly red-Indian profile was suddenly in the room; he scooped up the gun, carried the little girl out of the way, and yanked the heavy pieces of furniture aside.

Then the door was open, to show the pitch-black hall outside. Policemen burst in, there was the snap of handcuffs, and the sobbing mother rushed inside, snatched up her little girl, and hugged her. The door was pulled shut by a police sergeant who, having stepped out, shouted down the hall, "Take those blankets off the windows! We want it light when we bring him out!"

The prisoner gave an angry exclamation.

In the hall the blankets came off the windows, and now the light shone through the closed door where one narrow panel had been sawed away while the killer had stood at the front window, looking out onto Fraley Street and shouting threats. Now, too late, he could see how he had been trapped by a loudspeaker, some noisy drills, and four inches of space between a bureau and a dresser.

The Lieutenant glanced at Verner. "It seems simple enough now. It looked impossible before."

Verner nodded. "That's the way it often is. But a problem can nearly always be solved, given time, exact knowledge, and—"

The Lieutenant smiled. "—and, Richard Verner, heuristician."

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Glory be—a smuggling story!—of which we've seen few indeed these many moons . . . How Jeff Marshall, an American on the British tramp freighter "Isher Bight," followed orders to the letter (retainer for expenses, cash on delivery) on a confidential mission that left the police of Lisbon baffled . . .

C.O.D.: COURIER OF DEGAS

by LEON WARE

THE RAIN HAD ALMOST STOPPED when the *Isher Bight* docked. Only a light mist fell, diffusing the lights ashore and making the statue of Christ, high on the hill across the river, come to life. Quayside, the Tagus ran black and swift along the pilings. To me there's something menacing about the water between a ship and a wharf; it looks evil, like a baited trap. The police came aboard, but on a tramp freighter that business is soon over. We were cleared to go ashore by nine.

Evans, the mate, leered when I approached him at the gangway. His yellow slicker glistened in the deck light.

"You've a fine night for it."

Ever since I'd boarded the ship at Port Said he'd practiced his wit on me. I could hardly blame him—a 3500-ton tramp wasn't much of a ship to offer diversion.

"I haven't been here before. Where's the action?"

"Depends on what you want. Girls—just start walking up India Street out there and before you reach July 24th you'll be all set. Anything else, just grab a cab to Peter 4th Square and look interested." He licked his thick lips. "Quite a town, Lisbon."

A quarter of a mile up the river was the long well-lighted passenger terminal. A white cruise ship lay there, lit up like a midway. Opposite us was a considerably shabbier dock area where they were saving on electricity.

"I'd probably get more than I asked for, walking alone out there." I nodded at the street beyond the low buildings. Cars streamed in both directions and a tram rattled along this side of it. The street lights were faint and far apart. "I'll take a cab. Any word on when we sail?"

He shrugged. "Tomorrow night, probably." He grinned. "You'll have time enough."

"Evans," I said, "with your mind you ought to be in burlesque."

I went on down to the wharf and through the shadows, staying

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away from the corners of buildings. I kept my right hand on the long narrow sack of sand in my pocket. Most of the places I find myself in take a dim view of hardware, but you can always get rid of sand in a hurry.

I'm a courier—I suppose that's what you'd call it. Anyway, I take things here and there. The hours are long, the working conditions can get hazardous, but the pay is good. Sometimes the mission is legitimate, but that doesn't mean anybody's on my side. What I deliver has to reach its destination quietly and I've got just the face and build to do the job. I look like half the men in the western world—a little chunky, which I like to think is muscle, brownish hair, brownish eyes, a round face, and I need glasses to read the fine print. You know—kind of nondescript; you could look right at me and never remember what I look like. Thanks be.

Oddly, I'd never been in Lisbon. I like jobs in places I've never been. Nobody has seen you before. As for getting around, you can buy a street map in a shop and in half an hour, with any kind of memory, you know the area like the palm of your hand.

All I had for Lisbon was a phone number and the word that I was to keep my cabin on the *Isher Bight*. It was a good cabin for a tramp—two windows and a small bath. I had enjoyed the trip through the Med but now it was time to earn the $500 I already had and the $2000 I was going to get.

I stood under a street light a long time. It's the same in Lisbon as in any other big city: on a fine day the cabs will come right up on the sidewalk and chase you, but when it rains they all go somewhere else.

I finally got one whose driver spoke a little English and he took me to Praca Dom Pedro IV—Evans's Peter 4th Square.

Like any Latin town, the square was just coming to life. Most of the shops were closed but the awning-sheltered tables of the street cafes were crowded with pre-dinner drinkers. It was a kind of pretty square, with trees all around it. Cars were parked in the middle and the street was paved with mosaics of small colored stones. Everything glistened in the soft mist but nobody seemed to pay attention to the damp.

I dropped into a chair at a tiny table and ordered a white port. The phone number could wait that long, at least. I'm a tourist at heart.

The fortified wine was like nectar. They make some of the best in the world, of course, but it seemed extra-special, here in Lisbon. I brushed off the thought of another, found a phone, and got an operator who shifted from Portuguese to English between breaths.

The phone rang three times and

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I hung up. Then I called the number again.

"Hallo?" It was a woman's voice, low and throaty, just the type to go with the specified routine.

"Jeff Marshall here."

"So. You were due two days ago, Mr. Marshall."

"You know British tramps," I said. Then I added. "Or maybe you don't know British tramps."

"Quite funny. Where are you now?"

I twisted around and tried to see a name but couldn't. I began describing it.

"The large fountain in the square, Mr. Marshall. Where is it from you?"

"Just opposite."

"In exactly three hours, at a quarter of one, a boy wearing a white cap will stand on the lower rim of the fountain. His name is Alberto. Follow him."

"How small a boy?"

She hesitated. "He is thirteen."

"Kind of late for a kid of thirteen, isn't it?"

"Don't drink too much while you wait, Mr. Marshall."

She hung up. I always hate to be left with a silent phone. I went back out to the sidewalk, found another vacant chair, and this time ordered a red one, from Oporto. It was even better than the first.

It wasn't too hard to kill three hours. I sipped a couple of ports, had a cup of coffee so strong it made New Orleans' best taste like pap, and when the misting stopped I made a slow turn around the big square.

Practically everyone in Lisbon was out. I could see that my crack about a thirteen-year-old being up late wasn't funny; I don't know when those kids go to bed or how early they have to get to school, but they were all up and in the square. It wasn't until midnight that the younger ones began to disappear, but it was apparent that even wearing a white cap, a kid of thirteen wouldn't look out of place standing by a fountain at one a.m.

The cap might have been white once, but that was at least a generation ago. He wore sandals, a sweater that was too big, and had a face that was too old.

"Alberto?"

He looked me over quickly, nodded, and turned away. I followed him off the square, dodging the cars that still ran almost bumper to bumper. We went a block toward the river, turned right on Rua de Sta. Justa and over to the ironwork cage that was the elevator to the upper levels. Lisbon's hills go straight up and these lifts save a lot of climbing. I paid both fares—only pennies—and we rode up in the dirty car, without speaking, to the top.

Alberto led the way past a restaurant whose diners probably had a magnificent view of the sprawled-out city, then down a narrow alley, up an incline, around a turn and

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up some steps, and then through some arches. After a couple of minutes I saw an arch I recognized. I grabbed Alberto by the shoulder.

"Okay, kid. Let's cut the hocus-pocus and get to where we're going."

He gave me a veiled look, then grinned and backtracked three houses. He pushed on a weathered door and I followed him into a small paved court. Light from two windows glistened on the white stone blocks and outlined the wrought-iron grille and the flowering shrubs in their big pots. There were glass curtains and looped-back drapes on the two windows. The step through the archway had taken me from Harlem to Beekman Place, just like that.

Alberto pointed at the recessed doorway to the left of the windows, then turned back toward the arch. I caught his arm again.

"Thanks," I said. "You can talk, can't you?"

"You betcha," he said and left me there.

The polished knocker was in the form of a woman's hand. I worked it three times and from the sound it made, the door must have been of oak, a couple of inches thick. The court darkened as someone unlooped the drapes and let them fall, and after a few moments the door opened. I stepped into a small stone-floored entry and the door closed behind me. I turned around.

She came about to my chin. Dark hair, dark eyes, and dressed in a black, tight-fitting suit. Very dramatic-looking except that it was a little like a scouting report on some ball players: "good field, no hit." She wasn't pretty. Her nose and her mouth were both too big. It was a shame, too, because after she'd put my coat in an alcove she walked ahead of me into the living room. It seemed incongruous not to have something special in the way of a face to go with that body.

A silver coffee pot and two cups set in silver holders were on the table in front of the sofa. I smelled cigar smoke and looked around quickly, but we were alone. Then as she sank onto the sofa I saw a thin cigar lying in a tray beside an opened book.

"Coffee, Mr. Marshall?"

"Sure," I said. I sat down in a big chair facing her. "What do I do for $2000?"

She poured the coffee and handed me a demitasse.

"Are you in so big a hurry?"

"Like you pointed out, I'm two days late."

"Getting here. Your ship doesn't leave until tomorrow night."

"Okay, so I'm not in a hurry. Maybe I'm sleepy. Even if kids are still up in Lisbon, it's past my bedtime."

She sipped her coffee, then picked up the cigar and relit it with a silver lighter. Somehow or other the cigar didn't seem an affectation.

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"Are you familiar with art, Mr. Marshall?"

I tasted the coffee. It was delicious. "Somewhere in high school I had an Art Appreciation course. Why?"

"Do you know the name Degas?"

"Sure. It's a cigarillo." When she lifted her eyes they flashed angrily, so I added, "He was a painter. French. Big name."

"A very big name, Mr. Marshall. His pictures command high prices. There was a charming one here, in the national gallery, worth a quarter of a million—in the open market."

I reached for my coffee again and then looked at her. *"Was?"*

She sipped, her eyes fixed on mine. "Was."

"That's interesting. Where is it now?"

"By the time you finish another cup of coffee, it will be in the lining of your coat."

I didn't know if I was going to finish even the first cup. There are a couple of places in the world where there's a price on my head, but I never carried a load like this on my back.

"Do they know it isn't in the gallery any more?"

"I hope not." She crossed her legs and gently wagged the top one. "It was on the second floor. The guard has arthritis and usually goes up just once, about eleven. That's why you're not in bed at one o'clock. I had to wait."

Looking at her, I could believe it. In a dimly lighted gallery she could probably move as silently as a shadow.

"But they'll know tomorrow, won't they?"

"Perhaps not. I put up one of their own notices that the exhibit had been removed for cleaning."

"And if that doesn't work?"

She smiled for the first time. "That's why you're getting $2000 more just for wearing your coat. They'll check the airports first. You will have sailed before they get around to the freighters."

"We'll suppose I have. What then?"

"You dock in Tilbury sometime Tuesday. On the train to London a man will be waiting in the dining car at the first small table near the door. You sit opposite him and hang your coat over his. When you reach London he will leave first—with your coat. You take his."

"And the $2000?"

"Will be in the pocket of his coat."

"Suppose it isn't?"

She smiled a second time. "Shout 'Stop thief!' and call a bobby."

"Suppose this guy isn't there?"

I've seen men draw on a cigar to gain time, but this was the first I'd witnessed a woman do it. After a full half minute she looked up at me.

"You come recommended as reasonably honest, Mr. Marshall. I'd

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suggest you make sure you meet the train."

"I'm more careful than honest," I told her bluntly. "I don't make mistakes."

"Up to now," she said. She put down her cigar. "I think your coat must be ready."

It was. She even helped me into it. It felt stiff from the top of the shoulders to my waist, and when I moved it creaked.

"Don't be too active," she suggested. She put her hand on the doorknob. "Left at the first turning, then right down the steps and left to the lift."

The heaviness on my back was out of all proportion to the weight of the picture.

"Your trusting me with this is refreshing."

"Not at all. The man that picture goes to made his millions slitting throats." She opened the door. It was raining again. "Good night, Mr. Marshall."

There was a cab waiting at the foot of the lift, but I didn't take it. I walked back up to the square and got one from the cab rank. When I sat down the picture was stiff enough to give me a hunchback. If it had been daylight I'd have been less conspicuous carrying it rolled up in my hand.

The driver didn't speak English but he got the idea that I wanted to go to the docks and took me to the main passenger terminal. I got out with a crowd that was coming back from the night clubs and went with them to the upper-level bar of the building. The place was jumping with noisy characters having that last one before returning to the ship.

From a window I could see the *Isher Bight* down the quay. Unfortunately there was a small commercial harbor in between which I'd have to skirt around. I went back to the ground level, evaded the cabbies who wanted a fare back to town, and slipped into the shadows.

It was a long walk, dark and wet. My coat was one of those "water resistant" jobs which soak up after a while, but I'll say this for the picture—it kept my back dry. The rest of me was drenched by the time I went up the freighter's gangway. Nobody was working cargo and even the deck watch was out of sight.

I went to my cabin and put the coat on a hanger. It looked perfectly natural.

It drizzled all the next day, with fog hanging low on the water. Fortunately it wasn't wet enough to stop the stevedores. I stayed aboard, keeping my fingers crossed—one hand against the rain getting heavier and the other against the police showing up. If I'd had another coat I might even have gone up to the gallery. It would be nice to know whether or not they had missed the picture. I stayed smart, though, and lay on my bunk read-

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ing an old book of the skipper's. Freighters don't run much to entertainment.

At dusk the agent came aboard with our papers, and a little later the pilot boarded us, obviously annoyed. He growled, snorted, and stamped like a pouter pigeon. We swung away from the dock and went upstream past the white passenger ship to a turning basin, then backed and swung downstream. I was in the wings of the bridge and after the turn the third mate came out toward me, grinning.

"He's bloody well teed off. He was supposed to take that big 'un out, but they're holding her for some reason and he got us instead. No sugar." He rubbed his thumb and forefinger together, then went back into the pilothouse.

I looked back through the murk. You don't delay the sailing of a big cruise ship for no reason. I wondered if they were going through her cabins looking for a Degas about the size of a man's back—say, mine. I had that old tight knot in my stomach until we finally dropped the pilot, just beyond the bar. I went down to supper then; I felt like eating.

The Bay of Biscay was its usual self—wet, cold, and rough. Some day someone's going to have a pleasant northbound passage across it, but probably not in my lifetime. Everything the North Atlantic has left over is dumped into this pot and left to its own devices—all of them mean.

The Thames, however, was a pleasant surprise. The sun broke through the overcast as we started up and the river sparkled—it even looked blue. I thought that if this weather held I might hang around London for a couple of days; it's a good man's town. I like the central section, and the pubs, especially around Fleet Street at noon, are wonderful. There was a job waiting for me in Amsterdam that would send me on to Chicago, but the time schedule on that wasn't too tight.

We left the river at Tilbury, went in through the lock and into the pool. Customs was a breeze. The British do this sort of thing very well, respectful without being subservient—as long as you play the same proper game. Nobody slapped me on the back and I was through in five minutes.

With the ship's catch-as-catch-can schedule I wondered how the contact would know when we'd dock, but that was his problem. The train I'd take wouldn't be one of the specials they run for the big ships, but a regular. I found it waiting in the station, bought a ticket, and hunted up the dining section.

There was only one customer in the car—a young woman. She sat at the first small table near the door. She glanced up as I paused

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in the doorway and must have seen the surprise on my face.

Her coat was hanging on the wall hook behind her—a beige sports coat, something like mine. I found myself thinking that any coat of hers would look like a combat jacket on me. She was still calmly watching me when I looked down at her again.

"Oh. Sorry. I was looking for somebody."

Her eyes glinted with amusement. "Well, thank you."

"I—" I stopped and started over, annoyed. "I was looking for a man."

"He couldn't make it," she said.

I studied her. "Who couldn't?"

"You've just come in from Lisbon on the *Isher Bight,* haven't you?" She waved her cigarette at the seat across the small table. "Join me?"

I hesitated, then shoved my two bags under the chair.

"You'd better take off your coat," she added, "and hang it over mine."

I did, then slid into the chair. "You seem to know all the answers."

"I wrote them."

I motioned to a steward in a soiled jacket. "Double pink gin." I looked at the girl. She indicated the half-filled glass in front of her and I waved the steward away.

"You don't look like a throat slitter."

Her expression didn't change. "I work for him."

"It must make you want to wear high collars."

"He's seldom interested in more than one throat at a time." She picked up her drink and sipped it.

I looked out at the station. To my surprise the sunlight was gone. I sighed; England was going to be England after all. I might just as well go on over to Amsterdam. I turned back to the girl. She was pretty, but she didn't have the translucent skin that a lot of English women have, nor the accent.

"It's none of my business, of course," I said, "but how come a guy like that goes in for art and beauty?"

"Yes," she said, "it's none of your business."

The train started. The steward brought the drink and I paid him.

"What's the news?" I asked casually.

For an answer she turned over the newspaper under her left elbow and pushed it toward me. *Degas Still Missing,* said a caption. The story was datelined Lisbon and was obviously a follow-up on an earlier story. The police thought the Degas painting was still in Portugal and were working on a lead; and they were still questioning the guard.

"Tough on his arthritis," I said. "It might even cure it."

I laughed. "The only thing wrong with this dialogue is that we need a straight man. Nobody

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wants to play Hamlet. How do I know who you are?"

"There's $2000 in an envelope in the right pocket of my coat, Mr. Marshall."

I shrugged. "In that case I'll have another gin."

I waved in the steward, told him to repeat on both drinks, and looked out at the flitting scenery. The brick-row houses were thinning out into the green countryside. I've often wondered why they haven't labeled a shade of green "England." It's practically the name of the game.

I looked down at the newspaper again. Having a girl meet me was a surprise—but it offered possibilities. I usually go straight through a deal, but occasionally a zig pays dividends. The Portuguese Embassy would undoubtedly be happy to pay a substantial reward for the recovery of the Degas.

I didn't know the train schedule, but surely it had to slow down as it neared the station. I could drop off, grab a cab to the Portuguese Embassy, do a little business, and be on my way to the boat train to Harwich and the Hook of Holland in no time at all.

On the other hand, anybody who could run his private and personal Art Gallery—obviously for his sole entertainment—certainly had the means and undoubtedly the temperament to put his finger on anybody, any place, any time. I sipped the pink gin. It had been an idea, anyway.

We had sandwiches, which weren't very good, and coffee, which was worse, and we talked about the weather which had been dreadful. Then as we reached the outskirts of London it started to drizzle. By the time we began creeping into the station yards it was really slanting down. I looked at the girl.

"You're going to look a little peculiar wearing my coat, but at least you'll be dry from neck to heels. What am I going to do with yours?"

"We'll be under the station roof. You can carry it."

"Why not wear our own and make the switch somewhere else?"

Her eyes fixed on mine. "We'll play the script the way it was written."

"With different actors? After all—"

"Now, Mr. Marshall. Your part in the script is to do exactly as you're directed."

The brakes started grinding as we slid under a dark roof. She stood up, took down my coat, carefully inspected the stitches in the lining, then put it on. The sleeves came to her fingertips, the bottom hung below her knees, and the shoulders had the rounded width of a halfback. The funny part about it was, she looked cute in it.

I pulled my bags out from under the chair and took down her coat. I patted the side pocket. There was

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something there all right, and it crackled.

"Just leave it there," she said.

"How do I know it isn't strips of yesterday's newspaper?" I looked in the pocket, ripped open the flap of an envelope, and quickly fingered through the bills. They looked all right. I shoved the envelope back into the pocket. I glanced up and from the look in her eyes I decided she *was* cute—like an adder.

The train stopped. I opened the door and followed her out, carrying one bag in each hand, with her coat draped over my left arm. There hadn't been a lot of people on the train, but there were a good many waiting for a train on the adjoining track and before long we were pressing through a crowd. She got a little ahead of me, but I could still spot her wide shoulders.

I saw a couple of bobbies at the entrance gate but they were just standing there, not looking for anybody. A few feet inside the gate the girl stopped to greet a tall young man who had come through to meet her. I began bumping my way through fast, but before I got there she had slipped out of my coat and given it to him. He put it on and went on out the gate. She turned and waited for me, smiling.

Just before I got to her she turned again and went on ahead of me, walking slowly. I caught up with her at the gate.

"Hey," I began.

She stopped and looked up at the larger bobby.

"Officer, this man has been annoying me on the train and now he won't give me my coat."

Those two bobbies swung in on me like a team.

"Oh, he has, has he?"

The larger one put his hand out like a bar across my chest and the other one relieved me of her coat while I stood there helplessly, a bag in each hand.

"There you are, Miss," and he gave her the coat. "Now, you just run along while we talk to this chap."

She flashed them a big smile and turned, slipping into her coat. I saw her hand dig into the pocket as she walked swiftly to the busy entrance of the station. She didn't even bother to look back.

I didn't know what the bobbies were saying—something slow and pontifical about how lucky I was she didn't want to press charges. I was thinking that it can happen even to the best of us sometimes. You let yourself get jogged off balance and the first thing you know you grow a bit careless. I was in wet, jolly old England with what was left of $500—and no coat.

". . . and I hope you'll remember it, young fellow"

Both bobbies were eyeing me sternly.

"I'll never forget it," I said. "Where do I get the boat train to Harwich?"

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newest police procedural story

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**LAWRENCE TREAT**
TITLE:	***A As in Alibi***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Lieutenant Decker
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*This time starring the Chief of the Homicide Squad himself, in one of the best stories to date in this fine series . . . Keep your eye on the clock—all the clues stare you in the face . . .*

LIEUTENANT DECKER, THE LEAN, gray-haired, gray-eyed Chief of Homicide, sat behind the beat-up desk in his tiny office and felt old. Empty inside. Past his prime. Licked, washed up. Twenty years ago he'd have shot fire and brimstone, and blasted this overweight slob into a confession.

But now—what? Here was Frank London, a half-baked, itinerant bum of a folk singer, sneering at him, sneering at the police. Logic hadn't worked, threats hadn't worked, the tricks of the trade hadn't worked. Nothing had even dented the guy, and Decker had nowhere to go. Not up, not down. Not sideways. Just stay put and molder away. Call the case a bust, put it in the Unsolved File, and know in his heart that he'd failed.

There was only one thing that Lieutenant Decker was sure of: Frank London had killed her. Decker knew it and London knew he knew it—which was why London had that smirk on his face. A big, round, oversized face with large agate eyes, cheeks like little red balloons, and that impossible, twisted handlebar of a blond mustache decorating his lip.

It was a grotesque mustache,

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braided like a quoit or a pretzel or a wicker carpet-beater. The Beatles had their hairdo, Groucho had his cigar—but this joker had his mustache; and he was making a monkey out of Decker and the Homicide Squad and the whole police department. And when they released London, somebody would be the fall guy and his name was Decker. William B. Decker, a cop for 35 years and head of Homicide for the last 15. The smart thing was to hand in his resignation, then go home and tell Martha, his wife. And move to Florida or California and never work, never worry, never be alive again.

Yeah? Not me, brother, not me!

Decker stared at the beefy hunk of beatnik in front of him and said, "Okay, let's go over it once more. You got to the cottage around five, her folks were already gone, and so you and Jodie rehearsed for a couple of hours. You left her a little before seven, walked up the path to the top of the cliff where your car was parked, and nobody saw you. A damn freak like you, and nobody ever noticed you!"

"The invisible man," London said tauntingly. His deep, resonant, troubadour voice separated every word and enunciated it with care. "I left, didn't I? Or do you think I'm still there?"

Decker knew that the car had been driven away around seven, although nobody could identify London as the driver. "You got into your car," Decker said crisply, "drove home and took a shower. Presumably to wash off the blood."

"There was no blood."

"What did you do with the towel?" Decker asked. That was one of the few points he had. London's landlady was certain that a towel was missing from London's bathroom, and Decker was convinced the folk singer had used it to wipe off the blood and then had disposed of it, along with the white polo shirt he'd been wearing. "What did you do with the towel?" Decker asked again.

"I buttered it, put pepper and salt on it, and cut it into terrycloth canapés. My usual dinner."

That was the way the interrogation had been going. London kidding him, skating rings around him, and enjoying every minute of it. Always the showman, always putting on an act. And then London pulled a masterpiece of pure gall. He took the unbelievably long braids of that fancy mustache of his, pulled one ropy end straight up, over his nose, and stretched the other end at a right angle, to his right. With Decker facing him, the mustache now looked like the two hands of a clock, pointing to nine o'clock.

Nine o'clock—the crucial time.

He did it solemnly, deadpan, and then he twisted his mustache back into its usual pretzel shape, sat there with that maddening smirk on his face, and clammed up. That was his

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answer: nuts to you, Lieutenant Decker. And somehow, Decker felt he'd been given the clue to the puzzle—been given it by the man's brag and conceit; but Decker was just too dumb to figure it out.

Restraining an impulse to smack the guy, the Lieutenant thought back to the first, futile interview between them. He'd been pretty sure, even then. He'd asked questions, listened to answers, then sent London back to a cell for the night, while the Homicide Squad checked up on what London had said.

Orthodox procedure, and Decker thought he had the guy cold. Duck soup, he'd told himself. London's alibi depended on the time when the murder had been committed, and so he had simply set a clock on the scene of the crime to the hour of his alibi. Which was a trick that had never fooled anybody, once a case was properly investigated.

Except this time.

Decker scowled. "Then you went to the Red Grotto for your evening performance. Jodie didn't come, and you went on stage alone."

"The show must go on," London said smugly.

Decker's adrenaline oozed out, and his face turned red. "You sang *Frankie and Johnny,*" he said tightly. "Then you sang a new song, one you say you had just made up. A few people remembered some of the words. It started off—"

He picked up the sheet of paper on which he'd scrawled the beginning of the ballad, as some of the audience had recalled it. He read it off starkly, prosaicly. "'My love has gone to a far country, My love has gone away from me, Sing die, goodbye, Oh, sigh, sigh, sigh.'"

"Nice song," London said judiciously.

"Where'd you learn it?"

"I made it up as I went along. It came naturally." London gave Decker a self-satisfied grin and added, "That's genius for you."

"You were singing her requiem. How did you know she was dead?"

"I didn't. I felt sad. Maybe it was telepathy. Maybe her spirit was in me, for those few minutes. The audience was so touched that for a few seconds nobody even applauded. Then their cheers rang to the rafters. It was a great moment."

The folk singer cocked his head to one side and grinned like an overfed gargoyle. "It was nine o'clock, exactly."

Decker glared, then spun around in his chair. The swivel squeaked. He reached for the doorknob, twisted it. He swung the door outward and gave it a kick. "Okay," he said in a dead voice. "You can go. You're free."

London jumped up with a shout and held out his hand. "Lieutenant, that's great! Thanks, Lieutenant, thanks."

Decker turned away.

"Look," London said, "don't take it like that. So you were wrong. Forget it. Enjoy yourself. I'm going

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to throw a party at the Red Grotto that this town's going to remember for years. I'm going to have all my friends there, including you. Lieutenant, be my guest—the guest of honor."

"Get the hell out of here," Decker said, barely spitting out the words.

London shrugged, grinned, and left. Decker frowned as he slid his finger along the pieces of paper on his desk—the sheets with the words of the song and the timetable of the murder.

It was years since he'd blown his top and let a suspect see how infuriated he could become. Alone now, Decker asked himself where he'd gone wrong.

His investigation had been thorough, he'd examined the facts exhaustively. There were no loose ends, no doubts in his own mind. Jub Freeman, lab man and forensic scientist and a damn good one, had gone over every inch of the cottage, and the Homicide Squad had spent days questioning everybody who had been in the neighborhood. The picture was clear enough.

The Dorkins and the Finleys lived together—they had lived together for 20 years in the big stone house on Dixon Heights. Hannah Dorkin and Natalie Finley were sisters—their relationship was close. In his own mind, Bill Decker called it beautiful, and they were beautiful women in the fullness of maturity. Prominent in social work, married to eminent men, Hannah Dorkin and Natalie Finley were kind, gentle, rich in forgiveness. Decker wondered whether they'd forgiven London. And whether they'd ever forgive him, Lieutenant Decker.

Jodie Dorkin was the only young person in the household, and the Dorkins told the Lieutenant that, as a child, Jodie had sometimes got mixed up as to who were her father and mother, and who were her aunt and uncle. She solved the problem by loving them all equally.

Her father and uncle were distinguished men. Judge Dorkin was gruff, blunt, rigorous in his honesty and rocklike in his adherence to high principle. Decker knew him professionally and respected him for his clear mind and incorruptible character. Dorkin's clipped wit and his firm, impartial administration of justice had made enemies. No upper court appointment for him. Politics couldn't take away his distinction, but it had kept him from the advancement he so richly deserved.

Dr. Richard Finley was a small gentle man, a world-famous cardiologist and surgeon. He was urbane, civilized, honored in his profession. You looked at him and wondered how such an unobtrusive little man could have risen so far. But when he spoke, you began to understand why, and when you noticed the delicacy and strength of his hands, you knew there was talent in them. He had the king's touch, which cured.

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The four adults had gone down to their river cottage early that mild, summery Saturday afternoon. The cottage was at the foot of the river bluff, just within the metropolitan limits. A dozen other cottages were scattered along the bank of the river—pleasantly cool refuges in the heat, each of them with a dock and a boathouse built over the water.

Jodie was already at the cottage—she'd gone there the day before and stayed overnight. At 18, she was interested in folk singing and had performed here and there as an amateur; but she hadn't been serious about it as a career until she met Frank London. He had a good voice, he was an experienced performer, and on some level he and Jodie clicked. Their voices complemented each other, but more than that, they gave each other style. London's stature grew as some part of him softened and gained in understanding, while Jodie acquired some of his confidence and bravura. They were a team, and fast becoming the sensation of the small hootenannies.

Jodie had told her family that Frank was meeting her at the cottage, that they wanted to rehearse some new numbers. The older people had never liked London, but they realized you don't have to like your colleagues in order to work with them. And Jodie had assured them there was nothing serious between her and Frank, and never would be.

"He likes me," she'd said. "Maybe a little too much, but I know he's a heel. Except the times we're singing together, he rubs me the wrong way. So you've nothing to worry about, any of you."

And they didn't. They loaded the picnic basket in their boat, and went upriver. They didn't take watches, didn't know what time it was. That was part of the fun, part of what made their outings so carefree.

"We go upriver," Dr. Finley said, "and land wherever we feel like, or else we just drift back. We do it every week-end. Sometimes we swim, sometimes we birdwatch, sometimes we just talk. We eat when we're hungry. Occasionally we stay out overnight. We never know. But we're free, we're completely emancipated from time."

Brother, Decker thought. What a day to be emancipated!

They had returned after dark. They had no idea what time it was. Ten—twelve—two—they couldn't say. They'd been immersed in a dream world and their senses were drugged, suspended, heavy with sound and sight and the richness of their own living. Until they turned on the light in the living room of the cottage and saw Jodie.

She'd been stabbed with a kitchen knife. There was blood. There had been a fight. She'd resisted. Her clothes were torn. In the course of

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the struggle her foot had apparently caught the cord of the electric clock, unplugged it, and sent it crashing down. The cord was still hooked around her leg.

What the four grownups had subsequently gone through, they themselves could hardly relate. Dr. Finley had examined Jodie. Respiration had not entirely ceased. The doctor took over, and with the help of the others he improvised emergency techniques. First-aid equipment and some of his basic instruments were in the cottage, so he tried to accomplish a medical miracle.

There was no phone, and even if there had been, no one would have bothered to summon the police. Time was too important—a transfusion and manual massage of Jodie's heart were the only possible hopes, and they had to be done immediately, without moving her.

Natalie Finley had formerly been a nurse. She assisted; she was familiar with the delicate and unusual operation that Dr. Finley had performed before, in hospitals. He made the incision and they stood by and did what he told them to. They gave blood, under primitive conditions.

How long Finley worked on Jodie, none of them could tell. An hour, three hours? They hadn't the slightest idea. But it was dawn when Finley finally gave up and told Judge Dorkin to trudge up the hill to the nearest phone and notify the police.

When Decker got the call from headquarters, he tumbled out of bed and drove to the scene. He saw the two women briefly, then got the basic facts from Judge Dorkin and Dr. Finley. Frank London had presumably been there. The clock had always kept accurate time. Decker didn't touch it. Jub Freeman would dust it for fingerprints and examine it and the cord for any possible physical evidence, no matter how minute. The hands pointed to nine o'clock.

Decker had four homicide men at the scene before he and Mitch Taylor left to pick up London. London was the obvious suspect and Decker woke him up, heard him mutter sleepily that he'd rehearsed with Jodie and left her around seven, maybe a little earlier, that she'd failed to show up at the Red Grotto, and so he'd gone on alone, and what the hell was this all about?

Decker told him and hauled him off to headquarters. Decker's grilling was expert. London was reticent about details and insolent in his general behavior, but Decker thought he had a pretty good case. London had stabbed her, then set the hands of the clock to indicate nine, and figured he had a pretty good alibi.

He spent the day in jail while Decker gradually learned how a man can come to hate a clock.

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His first theory—that London had set the clock after the stabbing—ran into immediate difficulty. The time-set button was jammed and bent, and couldn't be moved. Decker decided it was jammed because, when the clock fell, the button had hit the arm of a wicker chair. Fragments of the wicker were wedged against the stem of the time-set, and there were clear marks on the chair to show where the clock had hit.

Microscopic examination made it seem highly unlikely that London had scraped off tiny bits of wicker and inserted them in such a way as to make the time-set inoperative. It was just one of those accidents. Therefore, London must have set the clock at nine *before* he committed the murder. That was Decker's first conclusion, in what he now thought of as his hours of innocence.

Medical evidence was consistent with placing the time of attack between seven and nine p.m. London had been there until almost seven, and everything in his background was against him. He'd been a juvenile delinquent in Chicago and had spent time in a reformatory. Later, he'd gone to New York and had become something of a Greenwich Village character. He sang and strummed in bars, drank too much, got into fights. He'd been arrested for assaulting a woman, but she'd refused to prosecute. There were rumors of other, similar incidents, although they hadn't got as far as a police blotter. He'd finally left New York, gone on tour, landed here, and met Jodie.

He was in love with her, according to everybody who knew the pair of them, but she would have no part of him. He'd made a few scenes at the Red Grotto, but she'd always managed to hold him off. To Decker, the picture of the murder was crystal-clear. Jodie and Frank London had been alone in that isolated river cottage. He'd tried to make love to her, she'd resisted, and he'd grabbed a kitchen knife and stabbed her in a violent rage.

So much for London. But granting him his nine o'clock alibi, it was reasonable to believe that a prowler had walked into the cottage after London had gone. The Homicide Squad combed the neighborhood for evidence of a stranger who might have assaulted and killed Jodie. No trace of an intruder had been found.

Which brought everything back to the clock.

It was an old battered clock, hexagonal in shape, and the numbers on the dial were indistinct. Nevertheless they were there, and the clock had stopped at nine. Decker bought two similar clocks and offered five bucks to any of his squad who could figure out how London could have jammed the time-set button in exactly the way it had

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been found. Nobody collected the five bucks.

It was a noisy clock, and the judge told him the family used to joke about it, referring to its death rattle. But it kept good time and they were sentimental about it, so they never replaced it.

"The electricity might have been cut off," the judge said.

"It wasn't," Decker said. "We checked that, for the last month. And we checked your fuse box. If it was keeping accurate time earlier in the afternoon, when you were still here, we have to assume it remained accurate."

The judge frowned. "I can't say that I really noticed."

But his wife had. "It was not only keeping time," Hannah Dorkin said quietly, "but the week before it had stopped making noises. I'm sensitive to sound, and I missed hearing the funny little rattle it always made. I mentioned it to Jodie, and she said she'd fix it, and she did."

"How?"

"She didn't tell me. We were making sandwiches and she was slicing some ham and she cut her finger. She went for a Band-Aid and we never finished the conversation."

Decker was still clinging to the idea that London had set the clock ahead to nine, and then murdered Jodie. Finally Dr. Finley scotched that theory.

"You couldn't set it," he said. "I tried to do something about the noise a few months ago, and I dropped it and bent that time-set button. Couldn't even turn it with a pair of pliers. But you couldn't hurt that clock. I checked it by my watch on Saturday, before we went out on the boat, and the clock was accurate."

The judge was philosophic in his point of view. "Lieutenant," he said, "we've both seen a lot of murders. The unbalanced man, the psychopathic killer without a motive—sometimes he commits a crime and isn't seen. Years later he's caught for something else and he confesses, and you just marvel at his luck, at the string of coincidences that made his escape possible."

"Not this time," Decker said. "London killed her."

"What does the D.A. say?" the judge asked.

"That he won't indict London until I can place him at the cottage at nine. And at nine—well—"

Decker turned away. At nine o'clock Frank London had been strumming a guitar at the Red Grotto and making public lament for Jodie Dorkin. He'd known she was dead, he'd practically advertised it. Therefore she'd been killed around seven—except that an unimpeachable clock said no.

Decker had traced Jodie's movements in detail; he had looked for a jealous suitor, for some clue that would provide a name, another

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person to question. Decker drew a total blank.

On Friday, the day before her death, Jodie had had an all-day swimming party at the boathouse. About a dozen teen-agers had come in the morning and stayed until after dark, but most of them hadn't even been in the cottage. Around 6:30, however, two or three of them had gone there with Jodie to get food from the refrigerator; but they hadn't even noticed the clock.

Nothing unusual had happened. Nobody had got drunk. There were no fights, no incidents. Decker obtained a list of everybody who'd been at the party and checked out their whereabouts on Saturday. They could all account for themselves, and so it came back to London. Every time it came back to Frank London.

What, then, had gone wrong? Where had Decker slipped up? He didn't know.

Grunting, he yanked open the drawer of his desk. His favorite pencil, his personal diary. There on the bookcase, the small stuffed crocodile that brought him luck—or used to. He wondered whether to take it home with him, or to leave it here for his successor.

Fifteen years as head of the Homicide Squad, and what would he leave behind? What was personal to him in this tiny cubicle of an office that had held so much drama, had seen so many killers break down, confess, and walk out the door to their inevitable fate?

He sighed morosely. Tonight, London was setting up a celebration. He'd get drunk and shoot off his mouth about how he'd put one over on the police. Maybe Decker ought to go to that party, after all. Maybe London would give himself away.

Decker stepped outside and told the receptionist he was leaving for the day. In the corridor, he thought of going upstairs to the lab. Jub Freeman was working on that robbery case. The clock would be over in the corner, on the workbench near the window; but if Decker set eyes on the thing now, he was liable to smash it to pieces.

He went out to the parking lot, got in his car, and drove home.

Martha seemed to know. She'd suffered these many years through all his moods, all his triumphs and despondencies, all the tough cases that woke him up in the middle of the night and sent him down to his desk in the small book-lined den, where he might scrawl out an idea, put together some outlandish logic, or connect two bits of apparently unrelated evidence that finally solved the apparently unsolvable.

Tonight, she seemed to understand. She was tender, quiet; she talked of small things in a low, comforting voice, while he sat on the couch and sipped at a double scotch. After dinner he stalked out, got in his car, and went driving.

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Anywhere. Out to the river cottage. Past the Red Grotto. It didn't matter where. He just wanted to be moving, to get away from himself and his problem.

He had a dozen bright ideas to explain how, although London had stabbed Jodie around seven, the clock had stopped at nine. Maybe it had still been going after she'd been stabbed. Maybe London had removed the glass over the dial of the clock after stabbing her, pushed the hands to nine, and then replaced the glass.

Decker swore. He was kidding himself with wild theories that no jury would take seriously. What he needed was a simple, down-to-earth explanation that would undermine the evidence of the clock and blast the cockiness out of London. He'd confess then. No doubt about it. Lieutenant Decker knew the type—he could handle guys like London.

Still driving aimlessly, Decker found himself rolling past headquarters. There was a light on in the lab—Jub Freeman was apparently working late. On impulse Decker swung through the arched entrance of the building and parked in his regular spot in the courtyard. He got out of the car, strode through the lobby where a sergeant was seated at the long high desk, and went upstairs.

Jub, a stocky, cheerful, round-cheeked guy, dimpled up in a smile as he greeted Decker. "Just checking up on a soil precipitation test that I started this afternoon," he said, putting down a test tube. "Anything on your mind?"

"I got no mind," Decker said sourly. "When I give up on a jerk like London, I'm a nitwit. No brains. Low I.Q. Been lucky up to now, but I got found out."

Jub corked the test tube carefully and placed it in a rack. "He'll give himself away, some time. He'll get drunk. He'll brag about it to some dame. Just wait, Lieutenant. You'll get him."

"I can't wait. You know what the papers are going to say tomorrow, don't you? Then the Commissioner will have a little talk with me and—" Decker shrugged despondently, noticed the Dorkin clock lying on a workbench near the window, and stalked over to it.

"Who the hell left it at nine o'clock?" he demanded bitterly. "Somebody needling me?" He plugged the cord in, then picked up the clock, clutching it tightly.

Jub said, "You've been working too hard. Go away for a few days. Rest up. Things will blow over."

Decker whirled, twisting his body. "Jub, don't try to—" He broke off, aware that the clock had started making its distinctive rattling. He glanced down.

As the six-sided clock now lay in Decker's hand, it was tilted 60°, one side to the left—that is, counterclockwise. The numbers on the dial were faded and barely legible. If you told time simply by the posi-

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tion of the hands, they now indicated about ten minutes to seven.

The Lieutenant gasped. He shifted the clock back one side, clockwise. The dial now read nine o'clock. The barely visible numeral six was now at the base, and the rattling sound had stopped.

"So *that's* how Jodie 'fixed' it," Decker said in a low, somewhat awed voice. "She just turned it one side to the left. Look, Jub. Stand it up the way it's supposed to be, with six at the bottom, and it doesn't make any noise. But if you do this—"

He shifted it to the next left of the six flat sides, with the barely discernible numeral eight at the base. The noise started, and the dial now seemed to show ten minutes to seven. "And nobody noticed that she left the clock *standing on the wrong side*. After all, lots of clocks don't even have numerals and people tell time easily enough."

Jub nodded. "She must have done it on Friday, when she was there all day. Then on Saturday, after he stabbed her and looked down and saw the clock, London realized what a terrific break had been handed to him. Standing in the correct position, with six at the base, the clock showed the wrong time—not ten minutes to seven when he stabbed her, but nine o'clock—time enough for London to give himself an alibi!"

Decker, wonderment still on his face, patted the clock and broke into a broad grin. "Until now—but now we've got him," he said, "got him cold!"

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magazine BOX SCORE for 1964

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name of magazine	*Honor Roll stories*	*percentage*
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine	50	44.1%
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Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
The Saint Mystery Magazine	11	9.7%
Playboy	6	5.3%
Saturday Evening Post	4	3.5%
Cosmopolitan	3	2.7%
New Yorker	3	2.7%
Argosy	2	1.8%
McCall's	2	1.8%
This Week	2	1.8%
Atlantic	1	.9%
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Chase	1	.9%
Horror	1	.9%
Ladies' Home Journal	1	.9%

The percentages above indicate that *EQMM* published nearly 4 times as many distinguished new mystery stories as our nearest competitor, and nearly 1½ times as many as our 3 nearest competitors put together—and *EQMM's* 50 Honor Roll stories in 1964 did not include the superior reprints, both short stories and short novels, which *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* offers throughout the year.

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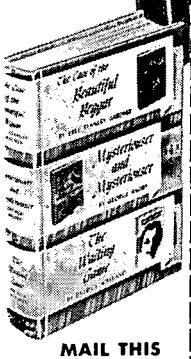

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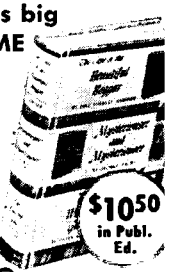

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